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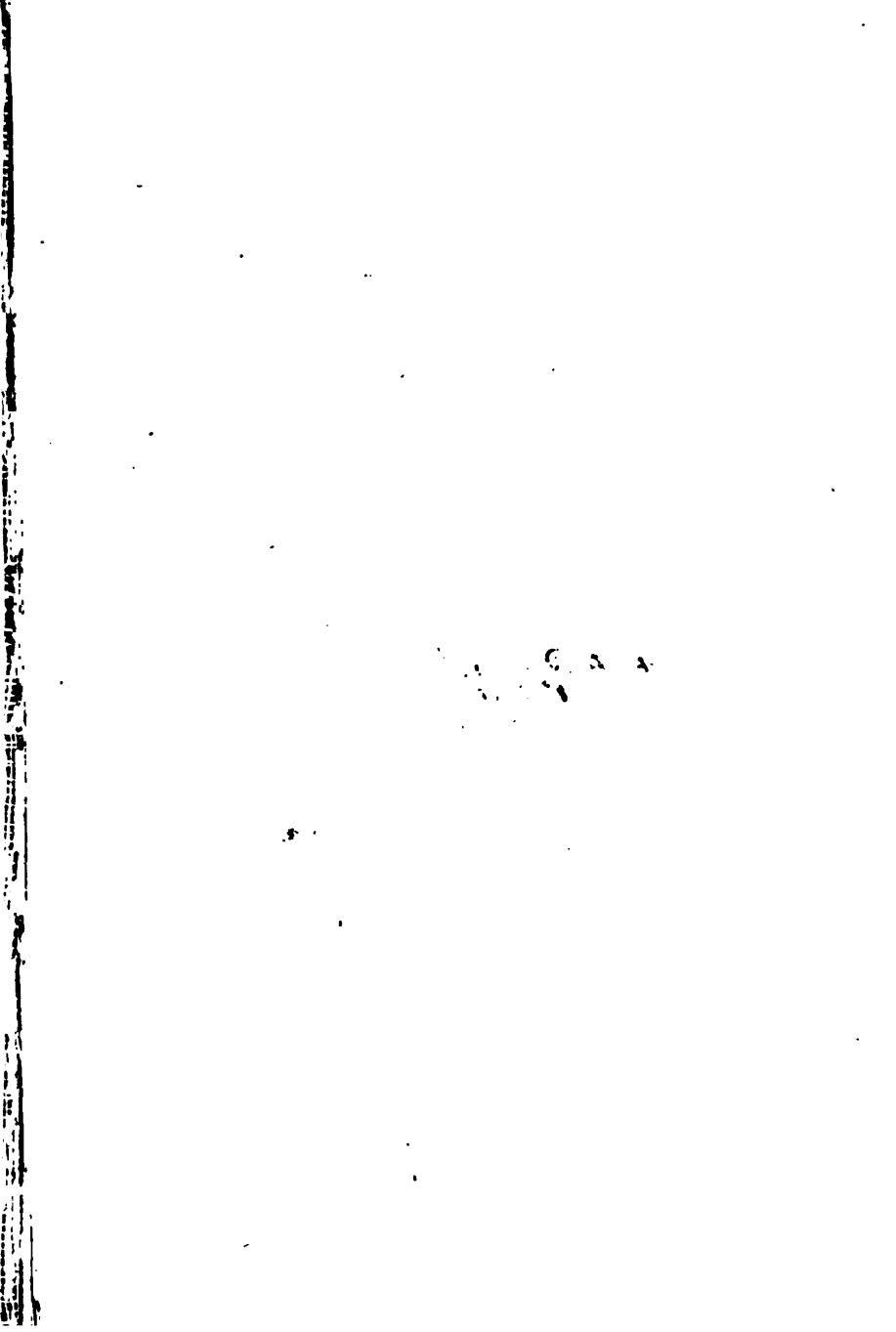
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John A. Dering

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W. H. H. H. H.

FREVILLE CHASE.

THE ATHERSTONE SERIES, No. 2.

FREVILLE CHASE.

Edward
E. H. ^{BY}DERING.

AUTHOR OF "SHERBORNE; OR, THE HOUSE AT THE FOUR WAYS,"

"MEMOIRS OF GEORGIANA LADY CHATTERTON,"

"IN THE LIGHT OF THE XXTH CENTURY," "ESOTERIC BUDDHISM,"

ETC., ETC.

Θεὸς οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς ἄδικος, ἀλλ' ὥς οἶόν τε δικαιοτάτος, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτῷ ὁμοιότερον οὐδὲν ἢ ὅς ἂν ἡμῶν αὐτῷ γένηται ὅτι δικαιοτάτος· περὶ τούτου καὶ ἡ ὥς ἀληθῶς δεινότης ἀνδρὸς καὶ οὐδενία τε καὶ ἀνανδρία. PLATO, *Theætetus*.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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In Memoriam.

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

TO MY WIFE,

GEORGIANA LADY CHATTERTON,

BECAUSE I HAVE TRIED TO EXPRESS IN IT SOME

HIGHER MOTIVES OF ACTION

THAT I LEARNED FROM HER AND FIRST SAW REALISED

IN HER LIFE.



FREVILLE CHASE.

CHAPTER I.



THREE years have passed since a question of identity was raised and solved in the drawing-room at Bramscote, to the satisfaction of all concerned, not excepting him who lost a property by it ; so that, even as Sir Roger Arden then and there stated, it all ended just like a play. Sir Roger always adhered to that opinion, and if anyone remarked, in relation thereto, that a play, if true to life, must be true to what has actually happened in life, he invariably retired from an active share in the conversation, saying by way of final protest, "Oh ! I don't understand about your abstract ideas and that sort of thing, but I know it was just like a play."

If the reader should happen to have read the book in which the events here referred to are chronicled, he will be aware that the praiseworthy and rare virtue of minding one's own business had led Sir Roger Arden more than once into some danger of leaving his own business to mind him ; so that, without the indomitable will and complete contrivances of Mrs. Atherstone, the drive to Hazeley, which decided whether his future son-in-law should know his own

name or not, would never have come off. No man would take more trouble about other people's business when charity pointed out the way ; but the way must be very plain indeed to make him see its bearings when anything like a mystery lay beyond. The only abstract proposition he has ever been known to put forth is, that "mysteries are no good except in articles of faith and that sort of thing."

Time keeps its even pace, but the supply of incident within it fluctuates much, as most of us can tell ; and we are generally happiest when there is little supply and no demand. The principle would be a startling one in political economy, but it is true in the science of domestic life ; and Sherborne happens to be saying so in the drawing-room at Hazeley just as De Beaufoy and Lady Fyfield are announced.

"Better to have no supply at all," said De Beaufoy parenthetically. "But where is Mrs. Atherstone?"

"Out somewhere," answered Sherborne : "she is as active as ever."

"Has the neighbourhood been as free from the jostling interruption of events as I have—and you too, since I was here last?"

"Linus Jones has been made Archdeacon, and he has got the measles in the house, and"—

"And Lord Ledchester had an archery meeting last Thursday at Monksgallows," said Mrs. Sherborne, *née* Mary Arden. "And we were caught in a thunderstorm coming home. And Lord Oxborough has given up the hounds."

"And taken to prize cattle," added Sherborne.

"And has remembered his near relationship to you since you inherited Hazeley," suggested De Beaufoy.

"Oh! well—I don't like that sort of thing. You see he hadn't much chance of knowing where he was before," said Sir Roger, who had ridden over from Bramscote.

"The old leaven in the convert," answered De Beaufoy. "You see I am not so well in hand as you are ; and after all—why it is true. What other news?"

"Since you were here last—a year ago? Well, nothing under ten miles. Young Freville is at Freville Chase. You know his father died some years ago."

"Yes, I knew him well. This man is the son of the first wife. His father married again—I forget her name, but she was Italian, and he died when young Freville was a small

child. The second wife died a few days after, leaving a baby who died later on. Sir Richard Dytchley was guardian to the eldest"—

"Who consequently spent his holidays at Netherwood when he was a boy," said Sherborne, "and has of course been there a great deal since, and goes there as often as he can now, I believe; but he virtually took possession of Freville Chase about a year and a half ago, though, according to his father's will, he is not of age till five and twenty, which he will be in a few days. Lady Dytchley is very well satisfied to be rid of him from Netherwood, I think."

"Now, now, there it is again," said Sir Roger. "Why should she want to get rid of him?"

"Why the fact is," began Sherborne, "that when a person is playing two games, and desires to win one more than the other, the other is not likely to have a fair chance."

"When a person is playing two games! what games? what's the meaning of all that?—I don't want to hear about principles and abstract ideas and that sort of thing."

"But it was the concrete Lady Dytchley that I was speaking of," answered Sherborne.

"No, no; I won't hear it," interrupted Sir Roger, rising abruptly and moving towards the door. "It's all the same thing, I must be going. I shall see you all then on Wednesday at dinner: you will meet the Dytchleys and young Freville."

"As you were saying," suggested Dr. Beaufoy, with a side glance at the closing door.

"My judgment may be wrong," said Sherborne, "but it can't be rash, inasmuch as I have formed it on sufficient grounds. I knew Lady Dytchley pretty well when I was a boy, and didn't believe in her then. Well—a small boy's judgment goes for nothing of itself—but I don't believe in her now."

"Which is a great deal for you to say of a woman," said his wife.

"Yes, I *do* believe in women—and I have every reason to do so; but I don't believe in Lady Dytchley. Young Freville has passed a great deal of his time at Netherwood, and there has grown up a sort of—what shall I call it?—a tacit engagement between him and the eldest daughter, which went on all the more smoothly because Freville's

father and Sir Richard, who were old friends, had arranged it so, conditionally on the subsequent consent of the two people most concerned. The two principals have agreed very much with that view of the case, especially as they grew older. Freville's father died—it must be twenty years ago. Miss Dytechley is now one and twenty, and they say she is to be married as soon as he is of age. But Miss Dytechley is very beautiful and has been very much admired; other probabilities seem to have got in the way; Lady Dytechley has begun to pull herself together and put in a sort of conditional manner, vaguely suggestive—you know what I mean? a way of going on that puts you in the wrong whatever you may happen to do, or seem to do, or be imagined to do, just as the temper of the moment, or some accidental occurrence, or the variable accidents of a particular policy may dictate. The long and the short of it is, that poor Freville is just nowhere. He is, I fancy, treated as if he were only half engaged; yet he is very much engaged, as regards himself and the young lady too, I believe. Now, taking the lowest view of the case, this is neither one thing nor the other, and had better be the other than be as it is: and if, as I think, there is a really deep feeling in them both, it may possibly turn out a more serious affair to every one concerned than Lady Dytechley bargains for. They have grown up together, and as their inclination was at one with the circumstances that favoured it, their lives have grown together”——

“Like two twigs in a hedge,” suggested De Beaufoy; “and human hearts are not adapted for trimming.”

“By the by,” said Sherborne, “there are some curious old lines rudely carved in an upper room of the old tower at Freville Chase—a kind of half prophecy that came to pass in a sort of way two or three generations back.”

“I remember seeing it when I was a little girl,” said Mrs. Sherborne. “It was carved over the door of the Muniment Room. I copied them at the time, and here they are.”

She brought out an album, and showed the copy of the inscription, which ran thus:

“When a soule ys wonne by ye barte ytt bath ybrokenn,
and ye knelle ys berde of a dyng race,
ye loste shall winne by ye straynere byr tohenne,
and ye dedde give lyfe unto Freville Chase.”

"Taking it for what those things are worth," said Sherborne, "it certainly is remarkable. I remember hearing about it in a long winter's evening, when I was a very small boy in the nursery; and I heard it confirmed by this man's father long afterwards, after I had joined my regiment. The nursery account, as it came through Protestant nurses, who had a very confused notion of Popery, was a mixture of ghosts and impossible conspiracies, and priests hiding behind tapestry; but the real story, as I heard it from the owner of the place, was this:—Freville's great-grandfather had gone wrong (whether in faith or practice I forget) and remained so, more or less, even after he had fallen desperately in love with a young lady, connected with one of the old Legitimist families, and brought up in a convent in France. He married her; but she died in little more than a year, and on her death-bed implored him to think of his soul. In a word, grief and conscience brought death and life to him. This happened in France during the very hottest time of the French Revolution; and Freville, mixed up as he was with the Legitimists, ran the greatest risk, and had to hide and fly from place to place with his infant child. Broken-hearted by the death of his young wife, and broken down in health, he sank a few days afterwards under an attack of typhus, or something of the kind, and died a good Christian. So much for the first line. His heart was in a sense broken, though grief did not kill him directly. Then the family was supposed to be extinct, as he was the last of that line; for nothing had been known in England of the infant's birth. That will do for the 'knell of a dying race.' Now for the third line. A number of Revolutionists broke into the house the very day of the Funeral, and carried off all the money they could get, with the exception of a few coins called 'tokens' which a faithful Irish nurse had concealed, and with which she managed to find her way (partly by begging) to England, and was able, by the papers and other evidences she brought with her, to prove the child's identity. Thus the lost was found. And the young mother, who died in giving birth to the child, may do for the last line, as she brought the true light of the faith to her husband, and also life to Freville Chase, in the person of her little son. Anyhow the thing is curious."

"I have known several very curious things of that sort,"

said De Beaufoy, "that one could not ascribe to accident without discarding evidence altogether."

"The knell," said Mrs. Sherborne, "may have two poetical meanings, referring to the death of the young wife and that of Mr. Freville, and also to the expected extinction of the race. They say that a church bell is heard tolling over the tower before the death of the owner of the place, his wife, or child."

"There is no mistake about that," said De Beaufoy; "for I was dining at Freville Chase when the late man was taken ill, and I heard the bell myself distinctly, first in the distance over the Chase, and then just over the tower. Those things, whatever they may be, are not so very uncommon—but here comes Mrs. Atherstone. I can't say how glad I am to see you again, my very valued friend, and still more to find you looking so well."

"And, were it not for the plagiarism, I should answer you in your own words; for I do value your friendship very much," answered Mrs. Atherstone.

"I should claim a good deal as restitution, for your having once disliked me so much," said De Beaufoy; "only I deserved your dislike."

"And I yours. We are on even terms about that. We were both of us looking away from what it most concerned us to do; and when people do so, they are not likely to make themselves pleasant in opposition."

"Just like your practical way of putting things. But what have you been expending your exhaustless energies on lately?"

"Teaching an old woman the Catechism—an old woman as old as myself, who has lately come to the conclusion that there must be something in Popery, and wants to know what it means before she applies to the priest. That is quite enough for me now."

"Well," thought De Beaufoy, "after the dramatic scene, in which you made a property and a name change hands, and worried poor Sir Roger nearly out of his senses, you are fairly entitled to rest on your oars. Yet I would back you now to ferret out any mystery, if it came in your way, and you felt called upon to interfere in it."

"How about that mysterious woman you put into your house at the Four Ways?" said Sherborne. "I believe you

have got a mystery there, if you would only tell us."

"And another old bureau with secret drawers that will help to unravel it," added De Beaufoy. "Now, do tell us what it is. I was an actor in that mystery, and I think it only fair that I should be one of the audience in this."

"I will tell you all I know about it, and all I am likely to know," answered Mrs. Atherstone. "Two months ago I went to stay there a few days, as I do from time to time, for the sake of old Susan, who has a nearly equal attachment to me and to that queer old house. I found a poor woman sitting on the door-step, exhausted by want, fatigue and cold—it was a bitterly cold day in March. Her appearance and manner struck me, for she was evidently not a tramp. I stood and watched her critically—a minute or two, I should think, for old Susan began to be indignant at the obstructive trespass, and got so far as 'Lor, ma'am, let me'—but I told her to be quiet, and continued my critical examination of the poor woman, who neither begged, nor looked up, nor moved. To make a long story short, I took her in, meaning to help her on her way as soon as she should be sufficiently restored; but as she had nowhere to go, and was evidently unused to roughing it, I kept her on, hoping to find her some employment. I have not yet succeeded in doing so; and as I have not the heart to turn her out, there she is still. That is all I know. She is very reserved, and I don't like to cross-question a person in distress who is under my roof and protection. She gives her name as Jane Davis."

"Can she be a convert turned out of doors by a father whose indignation has been guided by economy?" suggested De Beaufoy.

"No. She is not a Catholic. It is most probable that she is simply a person who has seen better days, and has no means of helping herself. There are but too many such in these days, when the country is filled with people educated out of proportion to their capabilities and chances, and when swindling, under the name of investments, has become a science. However, there she is at present, and I have no idea who she is, or what she is, except that she is a respectable person."

And let this suffice for a specimen of the conversation in the library at Hazeley three years within a week or two after De Beaufoy had lost an estate and gained what

was worth much more to him. How it was that he married Lady Fyfield at last and was happy, after failing to do so long before, how he became De Beaufoy, and another man became Sherborne, with lawful possession of Hazeley, how Mrs. Atherstone, who had been living for many years almost unknown in a lonely house where four roads met, turned out to be the lawful owner's great aunt, and how she made his identity most evident, we need not inquire here: for all this has been already written. It is enough for the purpose to have stated the facts. Having done so, we will leave the library at Hazeley.





CHAPTER II.

“Già eran quasi ch’ atterzate l’ore
Del tempo che ogni stella è più lucente”—



HICH is Dante's way of saying that it was nearly four o'clock in the morning. There were no stars visible, for it was thundering heavily, but there was a light in Everard Freville's bedroom at Freville Chase. The inmates of Hazeley were asleep, or at least in bed, and thinking no more of him at that time than he could cease to think of himself. We cannot help thinking of ourselves when we are in pain or sorrow; for both force upon our notice the fact that it is we ourselves who are suffering perceptibly. But physical pain is in its nature subjective: sorrow is sometimes inseparable from the thought of a living object. Everard Freville could not cease to think of himself, because he could not do so without ceasing to think of Ida Dytechley. Why he walked up and down the room, while the lightning mocked the puny flame of his one candle, that burned straight and pale on the dressing-table, and the pink light of dawn was deepening beneath a black curtain of thunder cloud, is evident enough, if we remember that when anxiety passes indefinable limits in kind or degree, the body, unless exhausted, refuses repose. Why the anxiety that kept him in a state of wakefulness, after the storm had awakened him, passed those limits, and why it did so then, rather than before, is a question

easy to answer, a problem impossible to solve. It is easy to talk about the subtle intuitions of the heart; but how do they become more subtle at one time than another? Either the occasion increases the faculty, or the faculty magnifies the occasion, or they act and react on each other. But what sets either in motion? Which of the two begins to affect the other? However that may be, it is certain that he was anxious, had reason to be so, knew the cause of his own anxiety, yet could scarcely have explained it.

"This is folly!" he thought after a while, or rather asserted in his mind. "What has happened? In what respect has my position changed? There *was* one difficulty in conscience, but that has practically ceased to be. Oh! if her father were a different kind of man—had been different! But the difficulty is over. She is seeing the truth in spite of everything—has almost seen it. Why have I been tormenting myself lately? What is the matter with me? It must be the electricity—the air is very close."

He threw open the window, but produced no effect except to make the glass rattle at each clap of thunder.

"It must be the electricity," he again asserted in his mind; "and the air is closer outside than in."

He continued to walk up and down, thinking in broken sentences till the sun had risen, and the one candle burned out, and the thunder ceased to roll; but the thought which recurred most frequently was, "Oh! if her father were a different kind of man—had been different!"

To avoid obscurity, it may be better to finish the sentence. If he had been a different man, his daughter would have been a Catholic, and her engagement to Everard Freville would have been straightforward, instead of being tolerated under protest: but he was not different, and we had better see what he was, that we may understand Everard's position. He was what may be called a genealogical Catholic—a man who hung on to the exterior of the faith, like a leaf that has frozen where it fell, and sticks without taking root. He never lost his faith, but it lay dormant, except when a dangerous illness or other strong stimulant to the conscience aroused it into action. He would have been very much afraid to die out of the Church, but was kept out of it for ten years by cir-

cumstances entirely dependent on his own free will. Weakness of character, obstinate infirmity of purpose, will account for this. There was no positive act of the will—for his will never acted otherwise than negatively—no intentional carelessness, for his intentions were vague and toneless as a loosened harp-string. His inclinations were negatively good, but unstable in themselves and dangerously pliable. When he married, at the age of twenty-one, his mind was oscillating between honest Catholicity and minimism, like a weathercock when the wind is chopping. Unfortunately he made the very worst kind of mixed marriage that it was possible for such a man to make. His wife was a member of the Church of England as by law established, rather than a Protestant by conviction. She believed very much in the social and political advantages of not being a Catholic, and cared very little about doctrine except when it started the quiet of the Establishment. She hated extreme Ritualists and ultra-broad Churchmen in equal proportions, and tolerated her husband's Catholicity, so long as it was bad, because there was a certain mysterious dignity in his inheritance of the same, and because he was quite incapable of acquiring personal distinction in any other way. If she believed vaguely in something more than the unknown and unknowable, her religion was certainly "for the most part of the silent sort;" for she said very little about it at any time, and never except in opposition. Her will was obstinate rather than strong. It was not led by the will of others, but it acted servilely under pressure from within, and whenever it came in contact with a really strong one, collapsed for the time being, or remained in sullen abeyance, like Achilles sulking off to his black ships. Nevertheless, by reason of a large and lofty figure, with features and expression to match, a full voice significantly repressed, a commanding manner and habitual self-assertion, she often exercised a real power that she did not possess, but only borrowed from the imagination of others, as an English general once frightened away an invading army by means of women in red cloaks. Beneath her ponderous personality Sir Richard's little weak will disappeared quite, and with it the practice of his religion. His two children, after having been baptized Catholics, gravitated into the Established Church through

neglect on his part and perseverance on hers, and as this would have put him in a dilemma at Easter or thereabouts, he ceased going to his duties till an attack of bronchitis opened his eyes by nearly closing his life. As both his daughters had reached the age at which the law of England supposes every one to be capable of choosing his or her religion with subjective infallibility, he satisfied his conscience by accepting the actual state of affairs as a *fait accompli*, contented himself with being just inside the Church, and left his daughters to remain where they were, or find their way as they best could. With regard to his eldest daughter Ida, Everard did his utmost to show her the way, and her instincts went with him; but Lady Dytchley put false weights into the scale in the shape of no-Popery legends of mysterious origin, dark stories from her own certain knowledge of things that she had no means of knowing, misrepresentations of doctrines that she had the means of knowing, and a judicious mixture of texts. As Ida believed in her mother, who told her these things, and believed in Everard, who told her the contrary whenever he had a chance of doing so, the poor girl's bewilderment was extreme, her interior conflicts pitiable and distressing. Inclination went one way, filial reverence the other. Everard's example pointed in one direction, her father's pointed nowhere. Everard's opportunities were few and interrupted: her mother could make use of hers as she liked.

Everard Freville, who knew all this but too well, and had some real though indefinable cause for being unusually disturbed by it, continued walking up and down his room, after the storm had awakened him, till the sun was high above the horizon, and only an occasional flicker of sheet-lightning from a distant bank of watery grey cloud told that a storm had lately been raging above Freville Chase.

Whilst he was preparing to go to Mass, three servants who were about to do likewise were standing in the courtyard, opposite the outer door of the chapel, discussing the late storm. They were of a class now all but extinct—as old-fashioned as they could be, old-fashioned far beyond the years of the oldest. They had grown up at Freville Chase, and remembered Everard's grandfather, in whose time nothing had changed from what it was in the days

of Bishop Challoner. All three were good solid Catholics who knew the Jesus Psalter by heart, did their duty for the love of God, and would have thought anyone mad for suggesting the possibility of their being in any other service than that of a Freville of Freville Chase. The spelling and grammar of two out of the three would have scandalised a modern pupil-teacher, and they had never heard of latitude and longitude ; but they understood thoroughly everything that belonged to their way of life, and could form a very sound common-sense judgment on any subject within the scope of their intelligence.

"It were a bad storm," quoth Sandford the coachman. "Just such a night it were as the night the old squire came home with his second wife—that is, Mr. Everard's father—for he weren't old at all, and he died twenty-one years ago come Christmas."

"And like the night, too, when that foreigner come as murdered the baby," said Anne, the upper housemaid, "I never could abear the sight of him"——

"Pack o' nonsense," interposed Mrs. Roland the housekeeper. "Nobody was murdered. You were only a bit of a girl then, and didn't know anything about it."

"Well," answered Anne ; "all as is, I know Master were took bad with inflammation quite sudden and died next day (which there were two doctors with him) and his young wife (she were a foreign Marchioness) took on dreadful, and the baby come too soon, and"——

"Yes, yes, we know all that," said Mrs. Roland. "It was Christmas time and we were having a dance and a big supper and his second wife (a Marchioness she was) having come home for the first time. I had gone upstairs to see Master Everard put to bed, for he had been up late for him when I saw her running along the corridor distracted, poor young lady, and she told me that the Squire was very ill"——

"Which I rode off for the doctor immediate," remarked Sandford.

"Yes," said Anne, "I remember you did : and the Freville bell, which betokens death was heard aringing first down in the Chase, and then in the air right' over the tower, all that night."

"And mylady, as we used to call her," said Mrs. Roland,

ignoring the interruption, "though they said it wasn't right, but I don't understand foreign ways"——

"Nor I, neither," said Anne, "and I don't hold with them, partiklar when a foreign Marquis takes and murders a innocent baby."

"I tell you he didn't murder anybody. The shock brought on mylady's confinement too soon; and that and the grief together made it go all wrong; and she died two days after the Squire."

"And," suggested Sandford, "she were very partial to her brother—that's the Marquis you was speaking of—she couldn't never see as he were of the wrong sort—which he were, in my opinion—and as somebody must be guardian to the child as were born—for who was to see after him with the Squire dead? she said on her death-bed as *he* was to be—and begged the priest to send for him"——

"And a nice sort of a uncle," said Anne—"just like the man in the story-book, who buried them princes under the staircase in the Tower of London."

"I didn't like him myself, not at all," said Mrs. Roland; "but he didn't murder the child. When he came here and went to see Milady's grave, he grieved awfully; and I don't think it was humbug. And then he went away, and came back three years after, and carried off the child with him: and nobody could say a word, for Milady had given him the right to do it."

"Well," said Anne, "all I know is that I've heard queer noises as aint right, in that room in the tower, that's been shut up as long as I can remember, and"——

"The Muniment room," said Mrs. Roland, "it's only full of old papers; and Mr. Everard has the key of course."

"I never see him go there," said Anne, "never."

"Well, he does go there, anyhow," said Mrs. Roland.

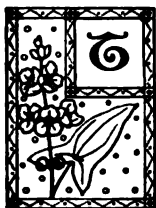
"There's noises as don't belong to this world," said Anne.

Mrs. Roland paused for a moment or two, and then said with much dignity but not without some secret misgivings touching the applicability of her reply, "You know the Catechism says the First Commandment forbids inquiries after hidden things. Come, the bell is ringing for Mass."

"There's a deal more nor that, I know," said Anne, walking slowly towards the chapel door. "But perhaps you don't like atalking of it."

"I've no objection—not at all," answered Mrs. Roland, looking back over her left shoulder with much dignity. "There's no secret about it. I've no objection to tell you all I know, at a proper time—not at all."

CHAPTER III.



THE storm had passed away, and so had the patches of blue sky, tinged with red and gold, that appeared to force themselves through curling masses of black and greyish-white cloud while the sun was rising above the purple horizon. That fair promise, like the provisions of a modern treaty, had left no trace, except in the memories of those whose expectations it had disappointed or fulfilled. The sky was grey and low, the earth smelt fresh, and a vapoury moisture, felt but not seen, streamed up from it.

Soon after ten o'clock Everard came out through a small door on the west side of the courtyard, where his horse was waiting for him, and mounted as quickly as possible, intending to ride to Netherwood, for the purpose of seeing Ida.

Meanwhile we may as well have a view of Freville Chase. The house was of grey stone, much mellowed by time in the older parts, where it gave hints of a very soft blue and pink, which the eye perceived but could not distinguish. It had been built at different times, and some of it was of a late period; yet the different parts harmonised so well that the effect, not only of the whole, but even of the worst part, as it stood there in relation to the rest, satisfied artistic feeling and made criticism seem out of place. Originally a single tower to which Everard's more remote ancestors came occasionally for hunting in the Chase, it had been greatly added to and enlarged during the reigns of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth. During the

reign of William and Mary, and the other pattern of filial piety, Queen Anne, the head of the family, Lord De Freville, apostatised for the purpose of taking his place in the House of Lords, and his next brother left England, declaring emphatically his opinion that it was enough to have lost the rights of an Englishman for having kept the faith, without having his name disgraced. The elder brother took his place, flourished according to his measure of things, and finding the memories of Freville Chase unpleasant, built a big house at Beynham, his larger and distant property. The younger, finding himself, after awhile, in some place where merchants most do congregate, took to trading, made money, and returning to England late in life, bought Freville Chase from his elder brother's son, who, as he never went there, was willing to pay off a mortgage by the sale of it. It was not worth much at that time, but when the greater part had been cultivated, and only a small part left as a park, it was worth about £3000 a year. It was by that time a large house, for inasmuch as its remoteness had been found advantageous during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and the British Solomon, it was enlarged considerably and lived at by succeeding Lords de Freville, until the period of the apostasy at the time before mentioned, when they deserted Freville Chase, and went to Beynham.

What the ulterior plans of its recusant possessor in Elizabeth's reign may have been when he began building, it is impossible to say; but he left the tower, and built an Elizabethan house to the south of it. Fifty years later it formed a square, or rather oblong court, by the addition of two long and lower sides, with a gatehouse and two stone balustrades at the end. The old tower now reared its venerable head exactly half-way between the two ends of the right side, of whose length it made about two-thirds, projecting ten or twelve feet into the court, and considerably more on the outside. In the centre of the left side, and therefore opposite the tower, there had been a side entrance leading into a large vaulted room, perhaps intended for a banqueting hall, or possibly for a chapel, if the owner happened at the time to feel singularly hopeful of better days; and in fact as soon as there was any possibility of hearing Mass otherwise than by stealth, it did become

a chapel. At last, Everard's father, having some ready money at his disposal after a long minority, converted it into a Gothic church, bringing it forward several feet, and making it a little higher. Beyond the Elizabethan part of the building was a terrace fronting the south. The stables were behind the left side of the square on the west, and shut out from the terrace by a high wall covered with ivy. The kitchen gardens were a little way beyond the terrace, to the west, sheltered from the north by a deep clump of old walnut trees. Beyond the terrace on the south, an old-fashioned garden or pleasure-ground sloped gradually down to a piece of ornamental water. Beyond again and around lay the wild park. It was of moderate size, but seemed indefinitely large, by reason of its uncertain boundaries hidden in ferny hollows: its undulating stretches of wild grass-land, and the fact that what little arable there was beyond it could not be seen from the house. Viewed from the terrace, the whole estate, which measured nearly four thousand acres of poor land, appeared to be a wild park of great and uncertain extent. To all appearance, it was still in fact, as in name, Freville Chase.

○ It is evident that the house was out of proportion to the rent-roll. Two long minorities, with an interval of only twenty-three years between them, had taken off one heavy mortgage and paid for building the church; but the disproportion was not perceptibly diminished.

Everard had not ridden ten yards down the courtyard when Mrs. Roland appeared at a door on the lower side of the house, and made it evident not only that she had something to say, but that she meant to say it.

"If it were anybody else,"—thought he, as he pulled up. She had not only been fifty years in the family, but had had the sole charge of him between the ages of three and eight, fulfilling that duty with the most remarkable care, judgment, good temper and firmness. Hurry or no hurry, he must listen to her. Her manner, as she approached him, was a perfect model of the almost feudal reverence of a past generation and of the dignified ease that comes from having an assured position in one's own sphere, and valuing it at its just worth.

"I am in a great hurry," said Everard. "Thunderbolt is very fresh."

"*You* can ride him, Master Everard," she replied, looking him over with quiet satisfaction.

"But what is it?" said Everard.

"That Marquis is somewhere about in the neighbourhood," said Mrs. Roland. "I heard so this morning. Bolton, the carrier, saw him yesterday at Ledchester. I don't believe that he murdered the baby—of course not, for I know better; and besides, he is not altogether bad. I could see that when he was here. But still he *is* bad, and he has that in him that he oughtn't to be bad: and he has grown so somehow—I don't know how exactly, but I suppose it's the Sects I've heard talk of. Anyhow, he's no good about here, and he can't have come for any good."

"But what can I do?" said Everard.

"I don't know," said she, "for I don't know what he's come for. But we must look out, and it was my duty to tell you of it, Master Everard."

"Thank you, my dear kind old friend," said Everard. "I will do what you tell me, as you used to make me do."

But by this time the horse would bear the delay no longer, and, after a vigorous plunge bolted across the courtyard into the park.

Everard was so glad to be fairly off, that he let him go, only just holding him together enough to keep him straight. He crossed the park at its narrowest part, steering between clumps of fern towards a small gate that led into a wood on the way he was going; but finding the ground soft after the last night's heavy rain, he turned down a winding hollow, and taking a low hedge which had no particular business to be where it was, went on by a shorter cut. After crossing a long stretch of grass as wild as the park, he came to a deep stony lane between two rows of overhanging trees. Then, being obliged to go at a foot's pace, he began to reflect; and this is how he thought:

"That hedge is of no use, and a wall costs money—so do park pailings, which besides have never been there, and would be out of character here. The hedge must be made better—would that I could see my own way as clearly!—and a ditch dug. What about this mysterious foreigner—my step-uncle, I suppose I must call him? So

I am to be bothered about *him*, as if I had nothing else to think of! But what harm can the fellow do, except to himself? Dear old Mrs. Roland is always right, where she has any means of judging; but she has none at all about him. What she said simply amounts to this:—Such fellows as he would not come to these parts without having some mischief on hand: but he *has* come; *ergo*, he means mischief. *Nego majorem*. They might easily have other reasons for coming: and moreover"—here he turned aside and went over a ditch into a piece of poor pasture land, with a bridle path at the end—"there is no mischief for him to do, if he would. The baby died of scarlet fever, or something—we know that for certain; and he has a right to all the money he got by its death. If he *is* one of the Sect, there is nothing in that line to be done here. It was taken for granted by the rural gossips that he murdered the baby, because, being a foreigner, of course he did; and having done that, of course he is going to do some villainy about here now. But as we know that he neither murdered the baby nor compassed his death in any way, I can't see why I am to suppose that he is engaged in some strange and impossible machinations against my well-being. And what could he do? He can't touch my property, and as to my life, unless he fires at me, for some unaccountable reason, from behind a hedge (and the hedges are not thick enough in this country) I think I can take care of myself. Rubbish! an empty, idle boast. *Nisi Dominus custodierit civitatem*. But the long and short of it is, that the man, be he what he may, doesn't concern me, nor I him."

Here he began to leave off thinking, and presently fell into a kind of intellectual doze, attracted by one of those mysterious influences that sometimes force our thoughts out of their course. Perhaps the windmill he passed, and the miller he spoke to offered the occasion; but probably the cause is to be found in that latent instinct of self-preservation which prompts the bravest hearts to seek, or at least to welcome, intervals of comparative repose, when anxiety has become almost unbearable.

As Everard's had about Ida Dytchley, if that may be called unbearable which has to be borne.

She had been in his mind while other images floated

over the surface, and she was there now, distinct where all beside was dreamy.

He had not gone far beyond the windmill when, turning into the road along which he would have to ride about four miles farther to reach Netherwood, he descried a male figure on horseback, whose identity brought him at once to a sense of present interests. It was a middle-sized man, who looked bigger at a distance, as did his mind (of course it was Sir Richard Dytchley) with well-formed features, a good deal spoiled by the weak expression of his mouth, a genial manner, too much on the surface to be cared for, and a neat but rather stiff seat on horseback.

"Ah! I am glad to see you are coming," said he. "That's right; I shall be riding back presently—by luncheon time anyhow! Reading away, as usual, eh?"

"Not as much as I might, I am afraid," answered Everard. "I have time enough at present, but having a thing and making use of it are facts of a very different kind."

"You think too much about things, my dear boy. One can't always carry out principles just as one wants. One thing or another is sure to cross you. All life is more or less a compromise."

"Yours is, at any rate," thought Everard.

"In the—the—the—most important things," said Sir Richard; "even in—even in what is—in what has a—in what concerns—in fact, concerns—our welfare, or, I may say, happiness—yes, indeed, people often make great mistakes about these things. Well! what was it I was going to ask you?—Oh yes, I remember! When is the Archæological Meeting? I thought of going to it."

"Next Thursday, I believe, at Monksgallows—a very suitable name if they happen to look at some old Elizabethan or Jacobean chimney-pieces, and go a little way into the history of the period."

"Ah! well—it was a struggle, and a—great mistake all round—more or less—more or less. They didn't mean it exactly as—as we should."

"I think they meant something when they hanged priests for saying Mass."

"Well, it was—it certainly was—but I met a very intelligent foreigner yesterday in the hotel at Ledchester, who said he should go there—a scientific man, I take it, making the

most of his stay in England. I don't know at all who he was."

"*Now* I shall find out whether this is the man," thought Everard. "There can't be two stray foreigners going about this country without a local habitation and a name."

"Good-bye," said Sir Richard, putting his horse into a trot.

Everard rode back in pursuit; "for," said he to himself, "he had to come to Freville Chase when my father died, being a trustee as well as guardian, and therefore he must know the Marquis Moncalvo by sight."

Sir Richard, who was satisfied with the wisdom of his own remarks, and had his own reasons for wishing to leave well alone, increased his pace to a hard gallop as he turned off the road up a sandy lane. Everard was taken by surprise at this proceeding and pulled in.

"Good-bye, I shall be back presently," said Sir Richard, waving his hand.

"But I want to know this once for all and have done with it," said Everard to himself, racing up the sandy lane till he was alongside of him.

"Why!—what's the matter?" said Sir Richard, pulling up, and trying to look amused.

"I only wanted to ask about this foreigner. He isn't, by chance, the Marquis Moncalvo?"

"Good gracious! no. Certainly not. I remember him perfectly well, though I haven't seen him these seventeen years. I should know him again anywhere. I am sure I had reason enough to do so, bothered as I was by all the old women swearing 'as they know'd he'd murdered the baby, and hoped I'd take the law of him.' Some of them stick to it now, I believe, though I showed one or two of them a certificate of the baby's death, signed by a very well-known English physician of the highest character, who was travelling along the Riviera at the time. What a nuisance people are when they bother one about things that are all right if they would only let them alone!"

Thought Everard, "That, like the other wise saws and modern instances, refers to me in particular and to others as an introduction. I wish that he wouldn't continually try to make me forget who he is by forcing my attention on what he is."

"Well, then, said Sir Richard, good-bye for the present. You may rely upon it that he is not in this part of the world."

"I felt quite sure he was not, before you said so," answered Everard. "But when you mentioned the foreigner at Ledchester, I asked you the question, that I might be able to stop a lot of idle gossip. Bolton, the old carrier, saw a foreigner (your man) at Ledchester yesterday when you did; of course it must be Moncalvo, or why was he a foreigner—and then of course it was, and 'he knowed it were.' *Hinc spargere voces*—which I wanted to make an end of. The report was absurd on the face of it. The Marquis would have come to Freville Chase if he were in this country, for he remembers me perfectly well. I was seven or eight years old when he came last."

"Just so," said Sir Richard; "for there never was anything against him beyond being rather extravagant (I have been told) in early youth. And then to go and say he murdered the child! Upon my word, you know!"

"We have positive proof that he didn't," answered Everard; "and I know nothing whatever against him in any way, and never heard anything, except that he had no business to be a foreigner, and still less to take charge of the child he was guardian to."

Here they separated. Sir Richard pursued his way at a moderate pace, uttering within himself moderate opinions. Everard looked at his watch and rode on slowly towards Netherwood, saying within himself:—

"If I am not too soon, Lady Dytechley will be out or writing letters upstairs, which will do as well. Do as well! which means that to be rid of her is a *bonum* however it may come about—which means that without her knowledge or consent, and in a sense diametrically opposed to her wishes, I must and will speak to Ida. A very pretty position for a decent Catholic to be placed in. My father and Sir Richard were great friends (how my father could have cared about such a man I can't imagine) and they both wished this match to be. When I was five years old my father died, and as Sir Richard was my guardian, there I was—left to grow up feeling myself engaged to her, with every opportunity of forming that terribly strong attachment which has taken possession of my life. I had no scruples about it when I grew older, for, besides her strong inclination, she had been brought up a Catholic till she was seven years old, and slipped out of the faith without any act of her own, but simply because her

mother meant it to be and her father let it be. And so it went on till Lady Dytchley saw that I was helping my own betrothed wife to get rid of the misty ideas and religious inclusiveness which her father's *laissez aller* way of going on had forced upon her as the only possible means of feeling any respect for him at all. Then I became aware of a change—an unwonted stiffness in Lady Dytchley, in Ida a strange constraint, a mysterious reserve, a pitiful expression of anxiety without the power of utterance. Then he sent me to travel abroad and I found that, somehow or other, I never could have an opportunity of speaking to her alone afterwards."

These reflections occupied much more time when they passed through his mind than they do in description, for he thought slowly, as became the immense importance of the subject, and sometimes rode on faster in a state of mental silence. When he reached the brow of the hill leading down to Netherwood he drew a deep breath and pulled in his horse to a slow walk.

"But I must and will see her alone," he thought. "Ida was baptized and brought up a Catholic, her father is a Catholic—such as he is—and wishes her to be a Catholic, so long as her Catholicity costs him nothing. And am I to leave my betrothed wife in this state, deceived, bullied, betrayed, and say that because parents have a right over their children, Lady Dytchley has a right not only to do what she expressly agreed not to do when she married, but even to use moral coercion when that daughter is of an age to decide for herself? Am I to remain silent while she, profiting by Sir Richard's tacit consent, is pressing their united influence, to stop the growth of nearly matured convictions and undermine the foundations of the faith in her whose soul is the objective part of my own? No! a thousand times no! whatever it may cost—no! I have a right, and I claim it; a duty, and I will do it."

The last few words had been thought aloud, and he was made aware of it when he entered the village at the bottom of the hill by seeing a pedlar turn at the sound of the repeated words, "whatever it may cost." They had a strange sound when he did hear them.

"He means to do something he don't like the looks of, and he'll do it too," thought the pedlar, who was a man

of concrete intuition, and had found the study of character useful in his trade.

"I am making an ass of myself," thought Everard, referring to the same occurrence.

The country below that hill is rich, well-wooded and smilingly picturesque, with banks and copses, hedgerow timber and winding lanes, cottage gardens pictorially placed and rural views melting into misty lines of many-shaded blue that gives scope to the imagination, repose to the heart.

Provided always that it be under no contradictory influence. "Like cures like," we are told in homœopathy; but, however that may be, a landscape that is found reposeful to the heart in health has the opposite effect on the same heart when it is suffering. Everard turned away his eyes from the view, while a cold current seemed to pass through him, as it were a long shiver.

Netherwood lies about half a mile farther in the valley, a moderately large house in a small park richly timbered. It was rebuilt towards the end of the last century, and is therefore characterised by squareness, abundance of steps, long sash-windows and a broad expanse of red brick mellowed into reddish brown. The gardens are of the same relative style, and are screened from the north by an overhanging wood with winding walks in it, wild flowers and an old summer-house. Altogether it is a genuine old English home, very homelike and very English. The brick rebuilding is of course bad, very bad compared with what preceded it; but one may perhaps be allowed to think that the stuccoed pastille-boxes of later date were a good deal worse, and even to question the superiority of certain modern attempts at imitating the styles of the remote past without the genius to create or the humility to follow.

The old place (for old it is, though the present house was rebuilt in the days when Sir Robert Walpole was Prime Minister and Lord Chatham a cornet in the Blues) has a character of its own, being genuine of its kind, and impresses one with the idea of antiquity, in spite of the sash-windows. In such English homes the beauty of domestic life used to be reflected in its surroundings, and the instincts that phrenologists call inhabitiveness was

strengthened by habit. That state of life has been improved away by modern English progress, till the normal country-house has degenerated into being a place of passing residence, a station to hunt or shoot from, a free hotel where excitement-seekers come uncared for and depart unregretted. It still hangs about here and there, a ghost of the days that are gone; but the old English home, with its heart-filling associations, its local sympathies, and the simplicity that could keep alive a vague tradition of faith where the One true Faith had been lost, is a thing of the past.

It was about half-past eleven when Everard rode into the stable yard.

"Where shall I find her?" he thought. "I will try the wood-walk: she often reads there in hot weather. How often we have played in the old summer-house, when all was bright and hopeful before us? and now I have to creep up there by stealth, because Sir Richard is a sneak. Shall I find her there? Supposing she should be in the house? And then there will be Elfrida in the way perhaps. I had better try the house—it will seem more accidental, in case I should meet Lady Dytechley—for I have to deal with an adversary well versed in making the worse appear the better part. I had better try indoors. Perhaps I shall find her in the old schoolroom, finishing the *Perugino* that Sherborne left her to copy."

He did so, and found her in the old schoolroom, not copying the picture, but reading with forced attention. Their meeting would have been a fine study for an artist: the composition was so grandly simple, the beauty of each comparatively so perfect in its kind. And then they were so completely made for each other. Everard stood for an instant erect and motionless, as fine a specimen of an Englishman as you could see. He was of middle height, well-proportioned, and muscular. His features were classically beautiful, and in the expression of his countenance an indomitable will and an almost feminine gentleness were blended into one, except when some special cause brought either into prominence. But we cannot pause yet to notice them more completely.

Ida was unnaturally pale, and when he entered the

room she raised her eyes wearily from the book, as one whose attention had been riveted rather than fixed, entangled rather than attracted, yielded rather than given. At the sight of Everard a transparent rose-tint mingled with the unnatural paleness and struggled with it faintly. She threw the book away almost pettishly, and a soft light came into her eyes as she rose and pronounced his name.

"My own dearest Ida," said Everard in a voice that was firm indeed, but as unnatural as her excessive paleness, "you are simply the whole world to me; but what book is that? Forgive me, my own Ida, I *ought* to know, and *you* know why."

She placed the book in his hand without speaking a word, and burst into a passionate flood of tears. Everard held the book, but looked only at her.

"I am so very miserable," she said.

"I know it," he replied. "I felt it. I was unaccountably impressed with the certainty of it; and that is why I came to-day.

"What can you do?" she answered, sobbing so violently that her words were almost inarticulate.

"Have I no power to comfort you?" he said, controlling his utterance by an extreme effort of will.

"Oh! what—what can you do?" she repeated. "What can you do for me? What can I do for myself? What can anyone do for me?"

"I can do everything for you," he said, "if you will do but one thing for yourself, and that is to put forth your will."

"That dreadful book," she answered, still sobbing, but with less violence. "It says such things."

"I know what is in the book," said Everard, looking at the title-page. "I will send for a copy, if you wish it, and show you the falsehood of the assertions that have been refuted over and over again, and are repeated over and over again all the same."

"Oh! do—do write it for me, that I may see it—have it by me, if"——

"I will; but the question for you to decide lies deeper, and is as simple as"——

"Oh! but how can that be. It seems so dreadfully difficult, so complicated, so"——

"I can easily simplify it for you, if you will give me your whole attention for a few moments."

"But I do always—you know I do?" she answered, in a softly reproachful tone.

"I know it—indeed I do; but that was not what I meant. I ask you to fix your attention on"——

"I *have* tried—oh! so much. You told me to do so, the last time you were here, and I did my very best; but I can't keep it fixed on the things you told me so beautifully. All sorts of unanswerable difficulties break in upon it, and—and I am so helpless! There is no one who will help me to see, except you; and you come so seldom now."

"My own dearest Ida, you know how miserable I am away from you. Prudence alone has kept me away lately. Had I come oftener, the opportunity of speaking would have been prevented as it has been before; and this opportunity is, perhaps, the turning point of our lives, the"——

"What—what do you mean? O Everard;—what is it?" said Ida, turning deadly pale.

"I mean that Almighty God has given you grace to see the truth. I mean that, notwithstanding the peculiar difficulties of your position, you *do* see it, and that if you—I will not say reject it, for the consequences of that would drive me mad to think of,—but if you delay to act upon it, the consequences will, in some way or other, be fatal to the happiness of us both."

"I have not rejected it—indeed, I have not! Everard *do* believe me; I shall go out of my senses if you don't! If *you* desert me, and say that I shall be fatal to your happiness, and make you—you—make you unhappy;—Everard, this is—is too much for me,—I—I can't bear it!"

For a few seconds Everard was silenced by this very feminine treatment of the subject, and his heart beat till it could be heard; but he recovered himself by a strong effort, and said:—

"Ida, you know how I love you; but the moments are precious. You want to be sure that your convictions *are* convictions, and that the grace of God, which you feel within, telling you what to do, *is* the grace of God. I will show you how you can be sure of both. But I must first show you what the question really is; for the objections that have been put before you, and which I will answer one by

one, if you like, hustle it out of sight by their multitude and confusion, and have much to do with turning people's minds away from it—which is, in fact, why they are multiplied so and expressed in such loose terms that it is very difficult to lay hold of them. The real question is this:—Did our Lord found the Catholic Church? We know that He founded a Church, and will be with it always, for He said so Himself; and if the Catholic Church is *that* Church it must be the only true Church, and the objections to this or that doctrine or practice, however strong they may be made to appear, must be wrong. Have I cleared away the rubbish and made the case plain?"

"Yes, I see; but you said you were going to show me how I am to know something.

"Something! Ida, I implore you to attend. You little know what you are bringing on us both"——

"Dearest Everard, forgive me, I didn't mean it. My poor head has been so bewildered by all I have gone through lately—all the"——

"I am here to save you from any more of it, and I *can* save you, if you will attend for two minutes more. You see what the question is?"

"I do—I do really. What can I say more?"

"Well, I proved to you three weeks ago that nothing but the Catholic Church can possibly be the Church our Lord founded. Shall I repeat what I then said?"

"No—don't. I remember it all; and you are right I know you are."

"Then you know that you are convinced?"

"Yes, now you have put it so, I do."

"And when cunning arguments were used in those books, that shook your will and seemed even to paralyse your conviction, there was a monitor within telling you what to do, urging you to do it. That monitor was the grace of God. But you want to feel sure of not deceiving yourself: you want to be sure that your convictions are true convictions, and that the grace of God is the grace of God. Conviction means that one's former belief, or one's opinion, or one's doubts, have been conquered by the force of argument or the weight of authority. The time is so short, and we are so liable to interruption from one moment to another, that I can't go again into the proofs which I have given you

already, and say why they are conclusive to you. Neither can I recapitulate why the force of authority has also convinced you—the authority of the Church which you assure me you believe to have been founded by our Lord. I can only say that as you are convinced regarding the general question—which includes the particular ones—convinced in spite of all this array of hostile and confusing literature, I don't see how you could doubt the reality of the fact—namely, that your doubts have been answered and removed by the force of argument and the weight of authority. We come now to the other motive of belief—the grace of God, which is infinitely higher and infinitely more conclusive. When the grace of God comes into the soul, showing us the truth, we are convinced, conquered, but much more effectually, if we attend to it, than we were previously by any reasoning however strong; for arguments appeal to the intellect, but the grace of God commands the soul to obey. You want to be sure, then, that what you feel within, impelling you to be what you were baptized, is the grace of God, and not your own fancy. Now did you, or did you not, find that, when you sought the truth most, and prayed most for light, and were most ready to obey the will of God, irrespective of anything else, you felt most convinced in your mind and in your soul?

“I did. I felt it. I know it, and I will obey it—indeed I will; but at present—my mother”——

“Ida, the duty of reverent obedience to parents is a sacred obligation. You know what I think about it, and you know that what I think is simply what the Catholic Church teaches. But you know also, that when obedience to parents entails disobedience to God, we must obey God rather than man. God commands you to accept the grace He offers you, and you must obey *Him* even at the cost of disobeying both parents, or you would stand condemned by His own words: ‘He who loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.’ But you are not placed in that position. There is no opposing duty whatever in your case. Even if you were a child, your mother would have no sort of right to your obedience in this: for she is only *one* parent, and the other does not require it, and she expressly promised not to do so, and you were brought up a Catholic till you were seven years old, and then—

but I will not pain you by saying more about that. And now I must leave you, for I see Lady Dytchley coming towards the house."

"Oh! don't leave me—but you are right, as you always are. It is better so."

"The time is drawing near when we shall be always together. Promise me, before I go, that you will now make the one necessary effort which Almighty God demands from you."

"I will—indeed I will: but what am I to do?"

"Tell your father and mother the truth, and send for Father Johnson. I say this on your account, not on my own. If it were better for you to wait till after we are married, I should advise you to wait; but I am sure that it would be worse for your own peace in the meantime, and make you feel dissatisfied with yourself afterwards. By taking the step now you will free yourself from those books and other controversial worries, that unsettle you, though you don't believe them. The delay seems natural enough now, as if it must be; but if you were to let it go on any longer, it would so oppress you to the last, I mean till we are married, that you would be scrupulous afterwards, fancying that you had not done your best about it. Believe me, scruples of that sort are terribly torturing and difficult to remove. I want to save you from them; and that it is the principal reason why I urge you to take the step now. The other reason is, that you know not what troubles may arise from your seeming to hesitate, what complications may come out of it. Don't make me explain till the danger is past and we can treat it as a thing that never happened; but do, I entreat you, take my word for the truth of what I say, for your own peace and for the happiness of us both. Were it not for the reasons I have mentioned, I should say, 'Leave it till we are one and uninterrupted: we have only three weeks to wait.' But I know that circumstances alter the case and make immediate action a necessity for your own happiness."

He spoke rapidly, knowing the importance of the occasion, and the shortness of available time; but his heart and will had one completely loved object, and his words

were pictured in his eyes, told in his voice, expressed in his every feature.

"I promise to do as you tell me," she replied. "You have persuaded me in the kindest and most convincing manner. But how could it be otherwise, when I see you and hear your voice? You have done it all like yourself—and what can be better than that? Oh! what a load you have taken off my heart. But there is my mother coming across the shrubbery. I suppose you must go."

There was no time for answering, scarcely for one last look. By great quickness he was just able to reach the shrubbery before Lady Dytchley had opened the door that led into it.

She was a tall large woman. The prevailing impression, when you first saw her, was that of size, and the impression never diminished, though the eye perceived that she was in reality neither so tall nor so large as she appeared; but you would presently be aware of a power which, if you were not afraid of it, would turn out to consist in the obtrusion of a slowly irascible temperament, a heavy self-confidence, and the constant habit of imposing her personality on others. She ought to have been beautiful, and you could hardly make out why she was only what is called a fine woman. There were hints of beauty at times, and glimpses of a softer expression that almost accused you of rash judgment; but before you could make up your mind, both had vanished, leaving you to speculate on the history of her heart, or shrug your shoulders and say "*Che volete?*" The story of her life would not repay the trouble of inquiry; but it is evident that to be the wife of a man whose character and ways of acting are manifestly contemptible, and who has not shown feeling enough to attract affection by sympathy, could not be a position favourable to the development of her better nature.

"So you are here at last," she said, when Everard confronted her, not without misgivings, a few paces from the door.

"I have been very much engaged lately," said Everard, standing in a manner that was not stiff but suggested the idea of fixity, and letting his eyes rest, as by accident, in a line with hers. He understood her character

thoroughly, and knew that he must assert himself in her presence. Lady Dytechley avoided his eyes, and began to twist the tassel of her parasol.

"I have had to see the new tenants at Claypit Side and Fernhill Farm."

"Well?" answered Lady Dytechley, twisting the tassel with slightly increased vehemence. Evidently she was working herself up by degrees: but her eyes vented their anger on the parasol, and gathered strength by not encountering his.

"And I have had to be away too," said Everard. "I went"——

"I don't care about that," interrupted Lady Dytechley. "It's no business of mine where you go. When did I ever ask you about that?"

"By your saying that I had come at last, I thought you were surprised at my long absence, as you might naturally have been," said Everard.

She made no answer, but twisted the tassel till it broke, and pressing the parasol with such force that the whalebone marked her glove, said suddenly,

"I will not have you talking to Ida about religion."

"I don't think you give me much chance of doing so," answered Everard, smiling, by sheer force of will, so naturally that the effort was not perceptible.

"That's all nonsense—you know that very well, I would'nt trust you, I can tell you. You are as bigoted as you can be. Haven't I seen you—didn't I see you the last time you were here—trying to influence her by pretending all sorts of things."

"What did I pretend?"

"There now. That will do. I tell you, once for all, that I will not allow it. It will be the worse for you if you don't mind what I say. There, that will do—I have some letters to write.

"What had I better do—go home or stay?" thought Everard, as her train swept stiffly past him. "If possible I must not let her suspect that I have talked to Ida this morning; or she will take advantage of it, to put doubts into her head, on the grounds of over-persuasion, influence of human motives, and the wonderful controversial training which every ignorant layman is assumed to have had from

the Jesuits. Now if I go home, she will suspect me when I am absent: and if I stay she will suspect me when I am present. Which is the safest for Ida?"

All this passed through his mind before the stiff train had wriggled its way two yards along the grass. The conclusion was so instantaneous that it could only show itself in its result. He took two long steps very slowly, that brought him in front of the rustling skirt, and said:—

"I came to-day because I had been prevented lately; but I had better not stop, I think, on account of having to see one of the two new tenants—which I ought to do this afternoon. I will come again soon."

"Very well, very well—good-bye," answered Lady Dytchley in a tone of conditional pacification. She was satisfied on the whole with her success, in spite of her inability to face his eyes; and she had reasons of her own for letting the subject fall into abeyance. Everard read her thoughts easily enough, for they were perceptible in every fold of her dress, and he too was satisfied, feeling that his interview with Ida had been successful.

As he was leaving the house Sir Richard was coming in.

"Shall I speak to him about it?" thought Everard, "implore him as he values his own soul, to stand by his child and save her from the persecution which he has himself brought upon her? She is worse than unaided. His passiveness is the one real power against her; for it enables Lady Dytchley to force her into this dilemma, that she must either look away from the oneness of truth, or be obliged to despise her father. Yes! The line he has taken is the one real difficulty that has puzzled her conscience and paralysed her will, and may yet be a cause of practical hesitation. And, in matters of conscience, even unintentional hesitation more or less unsettles the soul. Shall I speak?"

"You are not going yet?" said Sir Richard. "Don't be in such a hurry. Have you seen Ida?"

"I want to speak to you on a subject that most seriously concerns her," said Everard, with a calm readiness that made the reply seem an answer to the question, and showed no trace of the effort it cost him.

Sir Richard's reply was quite as ready, but by no means

as calm. "No, not now, not now," said he shuffling in his clothes as if several virulent gnats were biting him at various points. "I, really can't—upon my word, I can't. I have a letter to write before luncheon—I have indeed."

"I should not detain you five minutes," remarked Everard, forcing himself to look unconcerned.

But Sir Richard was too cautious to be reassured so easily. He walked into the house in unseemly haste, his legs appearing to move on springs, and, speaking from behind the door, said :—

"No, no—I haven't a moment, I assure you. Things *must* be done, you know. There is a man waiting to hear about something"—

"There are a good many doing that, I believe," said Everard in a low voice as he moved slowly towards the stables.

"Well, yes—there are," answered Sir Richard, who had nearly lost his wits at the prospect of being required to act like a man. "Well, then—perhaps after luncheon,—we will see."

"I can't stay—I told Lady Dytechley so just now. I have to be at Claypit Side early this afternoon."

"Ah! well—next time then. I am sorry you are obliged to go. Good-bye: good-bye."

"What *is* to be done with such a man as that?" thought Everard as he rode away. "It is cross and a temptation—a continual temptation against reverence and humility; but I must do my best. I ought to be satisfied with the result of my visit, and I am; for I have Ida's promise, which is everything. It is useless to disturb myself about him—I hope he is not as accountable as he seems—nor about Lady Dytechley, who, at any rate uses her influence in favour of the religion she professes. If she really has an objective belief in it (which, however, is hard to suppose in a woman who agreed to bring up her children in another), she is not blamable for the fact of using her influence that way, when Sir Richard gives her every encouragement, short of apostatising: but the means that she uses are cruel and dishonest. I hope she is not distinctly aware of either. Were it not for the suffering which Ida will have to endure for a while, I should go

home perfectly satisfied. . If Ida is firm—and she will be—the trial will be short. I must rest on the remembrance of her promise.”

He did rest on it ; so that the way home seemed short, because there were no time-marks within. Not till he was half way through the Chase did a disturbing question enter his mind, suggested perhaps by the accidental opportunity of having it answered. The opportunity came in the form of a grey head and a Roman collar appearing above the fern, where the grass ride on which he then was, turned rather suddenly.

“Father Merivale,” he said, *Do* come back to luncheon with me. I want advice—in fact, direction, about”——
“I can’t go back,” answered Father Merivale, “because I have a sick call at one of the cottages beyond Chase Mill.”

“Who is it?” said Everard. “Can I do anything?”

“She is a stranger, and, from what I heard, she will not live long. I will let you know if you can do anything for her.”

“Good-bye, then”——

“Stay a moment. I am not pressed for a few minutes, and if you have anything important”——

“Well, yes—I have. You know of my engagement.”

“Yes, and I hope that there is no impediment.”

“You know that Lady Dytchley makes it almost impossible for her to be a Catholic before we are married. What am I to do?”

“You are sure—are you not? that she *will* be.

“I am—there is no doubt about it.

“Then, my dear Everard,” said Father Merivale, “you need not disturb yourself about it. You are not called upon to sacrifice your own happiness and leave her in the danger of not coming into the Church at all. It is very hard for a man of your principles to be placed in such a position ; but you must bear that, if it is necessary ; and I know you will, like a man. God bless you ! I must be off.”

Father Merivale went his way towards the cottage beyond Chase Mill. Everard cantered home, thinking of Ida.



CHAPTER IV.



For about eleven o'clock of the next day, whilst Everard was explaining to Mrs. Roland why the foreigner seen by Bolton the carrier could not possibly be the Marquis Moncalvo, Sherborne rode into Lyneham, put up his horse at the White Hart, and having a few minutes to wait before the sitting of the Bench of Magistrates, went into an empty sitting-room.

"Then you will ride on to Dredgemere, while I am on the Bench?" said he to De Beaufoy, who had come with him. "There will be time if you cut across by Thornham brook—the water is low enough just now. You will find Bertram Fyfield very much improved since his marriage."

"Yes, his mother thinks so too—there never was any real harm in him," said De Beaufoy. "He was only a bit of a fool; and, as his wife is a sensible woman, he will do very well. Here is the old room, just as it was—the brown blinds, and the horsehair sofa, and the wineglass of tooth-picks on the sideboard, and the print of the Yeomanry Review, and the money-box of the British and Foreign Bible Society. And there is old Tomkin's shop opposite, with its prints of chorister boys and Newfoundland dogs and popular preachers. But Garibaldi has been replaced by a monkey with a red cap—there is continuity in that."

"I am fond of this room," said Sherborne, "for the sake of its associations; but you had better be off, or I shall have to start before you get back here."

De Beaufoy went on his way, and a stranger, followed by the Boots carrying a portmanteau, appeared at the door.

The Boots went up the stairs and the stranger entered the room. He was a tallish broad-shouldered man, apparently of no particular age, with dark eyes, a dark-reddish complexion, black moustaches streaked with grey, a thick beard of the same colour, and coarse grisly hair that sat stiffly under a brown velvet travelling cap. His manner was as stiff as his hair, his eyes looked into space, his voice was pitched lower than its quality seemed to warrant. He appeared to be a foreigner, but from what country? His manner was too stiff for an Italian, his articulation too heavy for a Frenchman. Was he a cosmopolitan Englishman who had taken to absinthe and progressive atheism? or one of those general foreigners from nowhere, who go about looking as if they had business of their own, yet have no intelligible employment? Or was he a professor of something from somewhere, who was in the habit of imposing respect on willing audiences by weight of manner? Sherborne looked at him for a moment, and said interiorly, "You are one of those fellows who go about making respectable English Protestants believe in liberalism by pretending to admire the Established Church." Then he turned on his heel and thought no more about him.

By this time a waiter had appeared, holding a napkin under his left arm, and rubbing one hand in anticipation of orders. The stranger, who spoke with a foreign accent that gave no hint of his birthplace, said :—

"Nothing, thank you except a glass of water, and a little ink. No, not any paper, thank you. I have it in my travelling bag. And will you let me have a piece of sealing-wax, if you please, to seal a letter."

The "aspettatore," as a well-known English lady called a waiter in Italy, fidgeted about during the space of a few seconds, looking with rounded eyes into the speaker's face, and standing on either leg by turns, while the forefinger of each hand performed a series of gyrations round the thumb. Finally he drew himself up, said, "Yes, sir, directly," and went in search of the articles named, remarking to the Boots on his way :—

"Well! he won't ruin hisself with what he's hordered. If he don't have no more than that he won't be no good, nor yet no harm; for he won't cost nothink except the washing of the sheets and the soap—but, Lord bless you,

he won't use *that*. I daresay his portmanteau is full of rubbidge."

When he returned, bringing a glass of water, a stump of red sealing-wax and a penny ink-bottle, he found the stranger poring intently over a hunting-map that happened to be in the room."

"How far is it to Monksgallows?" said the latter. I want to go to the Archæological Meeting there to-morrow."

"Twelve miles, sir, by the road," answered the waiter; "but you can get there by rail, if you change at Abury and get out at Repton—just two miles from Monksgallows, sir."

"Thank you. How far is Exbourne? It seems a long way."

"Well sir, it must be near thirteen miles, I should say; and it would be a roundabout journey by rail."

"Ah! I must find some way of going there. I want to see a faithful old servant of mine, who is a native of that place. I hear that she is in difficulties, and I wish to help her."

Thought the waiter, "You don't look much like that—a ordering a hold bottle of ink and a bit of sealing-wax and a glass of water; but then I don't understand them foreigners."

"Well, I will see about that to-morrow," said the stranger. "Now, is there any object of interest near here to be seen?"

"I don't know of much sir, unless it's the new Roman Catholic Church, as Squire Sherborne has built at Hazeley, close to the house. But to be sure," he added prudently, casting a sidelong glance at the glass of water, "it's a long way to walk—over seven miles the nearest way."

"Well, I shall want a fly to-morrow to take me to the Archæological Meeting."

"Bless us! He's a-coming it strong now," thought the waiter. "I ope he means paying."

"Is there anything else to be seen rather nearer? I should like a walk."

"Well, sir, there's a old Roman encampment this side of Bramscote—Sir Roger Arden's place, sir. The Boots can tell you the nearest way to it—he comes from near there—Yes, sir—Boots!"

The latter ejaculation, which was sent forth from behind the door, caused the speedy appearance of the functionary named.

"Show the gentleman the way to the Roman encampment, Tom," said the waiter.

The Boots led the way through the yard into a narrow street and round two or three corners into a lane, and said, pointing with his thumb,

"It lies over there, sir. This here lane haint nothink only a bridle road farther on : but you keep on a-follering it till you comes to a old barn, and then you turns up along a footpath as takes you into a village—but you musn't go there. You must go a-skewing along by a farmhouse to the right of it—and mind you go by the one as you'll see has a little thatched cottage down a little way below it, for the other would take you right out of your way. And then you must keep bearing round by the brook (there's a path across the fields there) and you'll get into a road at the bottom of a steepish hill—but you must turn to your right half-way up it, when you get to the sandpit near the corner of"—

"Thank you," said the stranger, who, it is needless to remark, had not understood a word of these complicated instructions, but supposed himself to have noticed which way the Boot's thumb pointed. "No doubt I shall find my way."

He went on, and partly by accident, partly by asking, arrived within half a mile of the place, when, taking a wrong turn, he found himself, after a while, close to the house at the Four ways.

Old Susan, who happened to be standing at an upper window when he passed by, exclaimed, "Lor ! whatever is he ? Miss Davis, *do* come and look now."

The person addressed came to the window, looked, and looked again, but could find nothing to attract her observation.

"What of him ?" said she.

"Why, what's he a-staring up here for—a nasty impertinent thing !"

"Because he knows what you are saying, and sees you looking so hard at him. It is enough to make him look up."

"But how he keeps all on staring at you, a-pretending as if he knowed you."

"Well, I don't know him at any rate. I suppose he mistakes me for somebody."

"Will you have the kindness to tell me the way to the Roman encampment?" said the stranger.

"Round there to the right," answered Susan; "and then you must turn by the—Lor! what's the matter, Miss Davis? you look all-over alike."

"Nothing. I—I thought I recognised the voice—the voice of an old friend: it was rather like. That is all."

"Will you let me in, if you please?" said the stranger. "I see that an old friend of mine is here."

"Don't let him in, whatever you do," said Jane Davis in a hurried whisper. "He may be a robber—and this is a lonely place. Indeed, I don't know him."

"Lor, bless you! Do you think I'm agoing to let such chaps as him indoors? But what makes you so frightened all of a sudden?"

"Because he pretends to know me, when he doesn't, and that is the way people get into houses."

Thereupon they both left the window, and the stranger, finding oral communication impossible, began to try what the door-bell would do for him. He remained at least a quarter of an hour on the steps, ringing at intervals, till, like the

*"Old man who said 'Well!
Will nobody answer this bell?'"*

he was fairly out of patience, and began to expostulate; which brought upon him the following reply from old Susan:—

"I tell you what it is, my man—you had better begin to go. We don't want no tramps here, and that's all about it. What do you mean by coming a-interfering with respectable people and trying to get into the house by hook or by crook? It ain't for no good, I know. Now I tell you what. I ain't afraid of such chaps as you, not I; and if you don't be off, I'll take and bring the old blunderbuss. It's loaded, I can tell you, for I loaded it myself last Michaelmas, when there was a lot of rough people about, as said they wanted work—but I know'd better.

They had got out of Ledchester goal, and was a-making their way back home—them as had any—and was a-peering about to see what they could steal. I knows how to use a gun, which my father was under-keeper at Squire Sherborne's—the last but one—him as died without no heir, and the property went to the last one, till they found as he wasn't the right one after all, and then this here one (as is as good as gold, God bless him!) come in for it. My father were under-keeper there, and he's took a-many such fellows as you, only they wasn't foreigners, as don't know where they come from and haven't no name, and keeps on a-ringing at the bell to see what they can get, but shackling chaps as hadn't no work in them, and wouldn't mind a bit of sheep-stealing if they could get a chance on a dark night with the snow on the ground, when they lays mostly under the hedges for shelter, and a lonely bit of road comes handy. He's took a-many such, and I knows em, and I aint afeard on you; and so you'd better be off, or I'll take and fetch the blunderbuss."

It is probable that the mysterious foreigner did not understand much of this address; but when Susan, who had suddenly returned from view, reappeared at the window, carrying a weapon of strange and fearful construction, with a short brass barrel as big as a small cannon towards the muzzle, he showed symptoms of not appreciating the crisis. Susan followed up her advantage by cocking, uncocking, and half cocking the cumbrous machine, to show that she was a keeper's daughter, while her companion signified in dumb show that he had better get out of the way. The final result was that, finding himself in a position both awkward and ludicrous, with just enough danger in it to make the ludicrous element seem much out of place, he followed Susan's advice and began to go.

"He's a-swearing in his own langwidge," replied Susan, putting her head out of the window. "Don't you hear him grumbling away, for all the world like an old pointer over a bone? I can hear what he says, and though I don't understand his gibberish, I know what it's about. I mind there was a French cook when I were a girl, as lived at Bramscote, and I knowed a young person as lived kitchenmaid there; and she told me he used to go on with his games just like that. He took and throwed the saucepan at her once."

"I don't hear him say anything," said the other woman, in a tremulous voice.

"Never mind! he's a-swearing to hisself. I knows their ways: but I knowed I'd get shut on him. Well! now to be sure—whatever is the matter with you? You're as pale as a sheet."

"I daresay I am; it was enough to make me so. How could I tell what he might do in this lonely place? I am not so brave as you, who handle firearms as if you had been using them all your life."

"He won't come here no more," answered Susan, replacing the old blunderbuss on two iron hooks inside a deep closet.

"Here is the policeman," said the other woman; who was still at the window. "Can't he do something?"

"The p'liceman? In course he can. Hi! I say, Muggles, just go and see about that chap. He's been a-insulting of us, and wanting to rob the house and that."

The rural policeman did not see quite sufficient grounds for active measures, but thought he might as well caution him to be on good behaviour generally towards Her Majesty's liege subjects, and especially those residing at the Four Ways. He followed his steps with long strides; gained upon him by degrees, and when near enough to speak with dignity, inquired if he had lost his road.

"I have lost it several times to-day," answered the stranger, trying to look at ease, "but not now."

"You must be careful," said the guardian of the peace. "They've been complaining of you down there."

"I know they have. I heard the old woman speaking to you. The fact is, I mistook the other woman for someone else, as I passed the window; so I asked to see her; and I suppose the old woman took me for a robber."

"Well, I don't say as it ain't all square. I don't make no charge. But all as is, you had better be careful." So far satisfied with what he had done, Muggles went back to the house, in order to see whether there were any grounds for keeping an eye on the accused. Susan adhered to her former opinion, stating more than once that he was a "nasty good-for-nothing fellow, as meant no good, and wouldn't think nothing at all of robbing anybody, if he got the chance."

Said Muggles, "That ain't no charge. You've been and made a fool of me, with your nonsense, making me get a-interrupting a respectable man that weren't doing no harm to nobody."

Susan rose in reply, or would have done so, only she was standing ; but Muggles declined wasting any more time, and proceeded on his rounds.

In the meanwhile the stranger was making the best of his way back to Lyneham, much relieved at finding that he was not to be taken before some mysterious tribunal and dealt with according to old Susan's views of the law. He made several wrong turns, and after going at least four miles out of his way, reached the White Hart about four o'clock, a good deal tired and (judging by his gait) rather footsore. The waiter appeared with his napkin under his arm, and the following dialogue ensued :—

"I wish to dine as soon as possible," said the stranger.

"Yes, sir ; immediately. Chops, beefsteak, roast chicken,—any fish, sir ?"

"Well, I should like some potage à la bonne femme, filets de soles au gratin, mutton cutlets à la jardinière, or fricassée de poulet aux truffes ; —yes ; that will be enough—oh ! yes—some méringues glacées, a little Parmesan cheese, and—and a bottle of Chateau Margaux."

"Bless us and save us !" thought the waiter, whose eyes had grown rounder at each successive item of the *menu*. Then, being a practical man, he added aloud, "I think, sir, I had better call the landlady, sir. She has been in foreign parts, and I don't rightly understand what it is you've been pleased to horder."

He left the room, and the landlady soon appeared—a tall portly woman with large features that had a fixed expression of readiness to fulfil the legitimate demands of her customers, open grey eyes that repelled investigation, and a measured voice audibly expressed. He looked at her, and appeared to wish that she were not there.

"I am afraid sir, that I am not able to furnish the sort of dinner you would like," she said, making a dignified curtsy. "We have no call here for anything more than roast and boiled, and such like."

"It is my fault. I ought to have thought of that," answered the stranger. "Well, then, will you be so

good as to send me what you have—I leave it to you.”

The landlady promised to do her best, and backed out of the room slowly, looking hard at him from under her eyelids.

“Thank you,” said he, turning away and looking out of the window, “I am sure that the dinner will be excellent.”

In process of time the excellent dinner was put upon the table. The first course consisted of a tough beefsteak decorated with strips of horseradish, a leggy Cochin-China fowl (whether roast or boiled it was hard to say) with thick slices of very fat and strongly-flavoured bacon round the edges of the dish, a huge cauliflower bristling up from an expanse of greasy melted butter, and some half-mashed potatoes of an evil savour akin to that of tallow. Being hungry after his adventures, he began to work away at the beefsteak in grim silence, while the waiter was uncovering the big cauliflower, and calling his attention to the mashed potatoes. After a while he turned his eyes inquiringly towards the fowl, but found no encouragement there.

“Sherry, sir?” said the waiter, pouring something out of a decanter.

The unfortunate foreigner tasted the curious compound and made an involuntary exclamation, that old Susan would certainly have taken for swearing in his own language. It appeared to be a mixture of turpentine and brown sugar. Next came a batter pudding, edged with enormous raisins, and swimming in a sauce of many colours, then a pungent Cheshire cheese, and, last of all, the old wine glass of tooth-picks from the sideboard.

When he had finished, he gravely complimented the waiter on the excellent cooking of the White Hart, and ordered his bill, saying that he should go to Ledchester by the next train, as it was more convenient for the Archæological Meeting. Soon after he took his place in the railway omnibus, and there we leave him “chewing the food of sweet and bitter fancy,” in the recollection of the difference between the dinner he had eaten and the dinner he had imagined. On no account was he sorry to leave the respectable market town of Lyneham; for, besides the unpleasing reminiscences of his meal, especially of the batter-pudding and the sherry, he was not without vague misgivings touching the ulterior consequences of Muggles’ cautionary

advice to be careful. For anything he knew, Muggles might have only been waiting for the deposition of the two women, when he said those words of equivocal import, "I don't make no charge," and was, perhaps, now on his way to the White Hart with old Susan and a pair of handcuffs. She, he thought, would swear that he had tried to break into the house; and the fact of her having driven him from the door with a blunderbuss, an episode that hurt his dignity not a little, would be taken as clear evidence. He did not suppose that the charge would bear cross-examination, even in the opinion of Muggles, but he had more than one private reason for not wishing to stand and unfold himself just at that time.

"He's a rum un, he is," said the waiter, as the omnibus drove away. "He's glad to be off too, I know. He didn't like hisself here. It's my belief he's one of these card sharpeners, and not a Frenchman at all, and hordered all that rubbidge for his dinner to make believe he were."

The landlady said to herself—"Can he be the man? He looks too old, and different altogether, It's the voice that's like—rather like—not quite—but it's many years ago. And then people's voices are often alike, more alike than those two. I wish I could know."

But she took no steps to gain the information.





CHAPTER V.



HE blunderbuss and the batter pudding had been too much for the stranger's equanimity. Was it not enough to be taken for a housebreaker, driven away by an old woman and suspiciously cautioned by a rural policeman, without being poisoned at an inn and paying ten shillings for it? He went indeed to Ledchester, but instead of remaining there, took the next train to London. While that train was steaming and jolting out of the station, the dinner-party at Bramscote was about to begin. First of all came the party from Hazeley, with the exception of Mrs. Atherstone, who had arrived early in the afternoon and was going to return the next morning. Then a fly drove up, containing two maiden ladies who loved gardening and rented the old Dower House. Sir Richard and Lady Dytchley, Ida, and a man with red whiskers, arrived soon afterwards, followed by Lord and Lady Oxborough, a daughter, and a strikingly handsome young man of about one-and-twenty. Everard was close behind in a dog-cart. Next came the curate of the parish, and then a burly youth who was studying agriculture because he liked hunting and shooting. Last of all the priest walked in. He was a young man, slightly built, and pale, with clear spiritual eyes and a firmly set mouth, in which gentleness and strength of will expressed themselves in harmonious proportions.

"I am afraid I am very late," he said to Sir Roger; "but I have only just come back from the other end of Lyneham."

"I am only glad that you were not detained altogether."

"I was sent for by a poor Irishman who was passing

through. He died a few minutes before I left. I have seen the story of man's life to-day represented in the compass of a few hours ; for I married a couple this morning, and baptized a baby just before I started for Lyneham."

At that moment the entrance of the butler produced a general change of position, and the sound of voices diminished sensibly ; but he had not come to announce dinner, though the dinner was ready to be announced. He walked up to Mrs. Atherstone and told her in a low voice that old Susan wanted to see her.

"That woman I picked up off the door-step must have done something unpleasant," thought Mrs. Atherstone, gliding out of the room as naturally as if she were going to look for a forgotten pocket-handkerchief.

"Where shall I find her?" said she, when the door closed behind the butler and herself.

"In your room, ma'am."

Upstairs she went, and found old Susan standing erect, her eyes full of vague information.

"Please, 'm, Miss Davis"—said Susan. "Oh ! ma'am, whatever shall we do?"

"But what is it?" said Mrs. Atherstone. "Has she shot herself with the blunderbuss? You should have gone for the doctor."

"No, 'm, not that, which I did fetch the old blunderbuss this morning (it was near one o'clock however) for a scamp of a fellow—a foreigneering man he looked to be, but I should not be surprised if he was a Irishman out of place, as couldn't do no good where he come from, and had got in with bad company somewheres, and were a-trying to make his way back home, and run shortlike, and weren't very particular how he helped hisself on. But I don't think he were neither ; for the Irish don't break into houses as that chap wanted to, and pretended he know'd Miss Davis, that he might get inside. And she stuck to it as she'd never seen him, which it's my belief it's a gang of them together, and as for"—

"My dear Susan, *do* stop that long story," interrupted Mrs. Atherstone, "I don't care about the man—there are plenty of tramps about the country. What has the woman who calls herself Jane Davis done?"

"She's been and took herself off."

"Are you sure of that? She may have gone out for a walk. Why not? People can't stay indoors for ever."

"Yes, 'm; but she's took herself off, you may depend on it. It were just after teatime, and I had just gone to see about"—

"Never mind all that. How long is it since you missed her?"

"Four o'clock it were; and that isn't all. Here's a letter for you, as she left on the table in her room."

Mrs. Atherstone opened the letter and read as follows:

"Honoured Madam, I beg leave to return my most humble thanks for the very great kindness I have received from you. Believe me, Madam, I shall never cease to feel the greatest possible gratitude for all you have done since I came to your door, a poor friendless creature without home or food. Circumstances which I am obliged to keep secret at present compel me to fly from the protecting roof that"—

"Yes, yes," muttered Mrs. Atherstone. "This is all taken from the sweepings of a Circulating Library. What is the upshot of it? '*Wishing you every happiness*' and the rest, '*I remain, with grateful thanks*,'—and all that. Well, there it is—we have done all we could for her. Stay a moment—it is late for you to go back."

"The under-keeper is a-going that way, and will see me home. But, as I was a-saying, that man didn't mean no good, as I told Muggles the p'liceman. I says to him, You don't know nothing at all about it, to say he wasn't 'doing no harm'; and you may depend on it she's in league with him to rob the house."

"Nonsense. If she had wanted to do that, she would have stayed, and let him in when you were asleep. She is not a thief—I am sure of that."

Mrs. Atherstone then hurried downstairs, and the dinner was announced.

When Sir Roger Arden had taken in Lady Oxborough, and the handsonie young man who came with her had gone next with her daughter, Miss Exmore, followed by Sir Richard Dytechley with Lady Fyfield and De Beaufoy with Lady Dytechley, Mrs. Sherborne, who acted as lady of the house for her father, sent Everard in with Ida; at which the skirts of Lady Dytechley's dress betrayed symptoms of interior commotion, though its occupant could not but acknowledge

to herself that there was no other place for him, since otherwise he must either go out with her, or have the red-whiskered man, who had no particular position, sent before him. The red-whiskered man fell to the lot of Mrs. Atherstone, the Curate and the student of sporting husbandry were apportioned to the two maiden ladies, Sherborne and the Priest followed, and Mrs. Sherborne closed the procession with Lord Oxborough. When seated at the dinner-table the party was divided thus :

LORD OXBOROUGH.		MRS. SHERBORNE.	
	O	O	
2nd Maiden Lady.	O	O	The Priest.
Burly Youth.	O	O	Sherborne.
Mrs. Atherstone.	O	O	The Curate.
Red-whiskered man.	O	O	1st Maiden Lady.
Ida.	O	O	De Beaufoy.
Everard.	O	O	Lady Dytchley.
Lady Fyfield.	O	O	Hubert Freville.
Sir R. Dytchley.	O	O	Miss Exmore.
	O	O	
LADY OXBOROUGH.		SIR ROGER ARDEN.	

Seldom has there been a dinner party at which the conversation was so steadily continuous. The two maiden ladies were Catholics, but they and their next neighbours had common sympathies that made the latter think them very agreeable, as in fact they were. The elder discoursed critically about gardening to the curate, who was an enthusiast on that subject : the younger, who was fond of horses, and had done a little quiet hunting in her earlier days, gained the good opinion of the burly youth by the interest she appeared to take in his sporting experiences and theories. Mrs. Atherstone, while taking mental notes of every one, fixed the attention of the red-whiskered man by incisive sentences and

original views of things. They made no very definite impression on his mind, for that part of him was of a loose quality, so that in that respect she might as well have tried to model a statue out of sand ; but they amused him because they were new, gratified his curiosity while exciting it, and, by reason of his own deficiencies, left him on good terms with himself.

Sir Roger Arden, who only required that his next neighbour should abstain from rash judgments and abstract propositions, kept up a brisk, but somewhat colourless conversation with Lady Oxborough, whilst at the other end of the table his daughter was endeavouring to sympathise with Lord Oxborough's taste for fat cattle. Sherborne was very well satisfied to be next the priest, and Miss Exmore was very well satisfied with the handsome young man on her right, but would have been more so if they had not been living in the same house for the last four days. Custom is often a severer test of the subject than of the object.

At that end of the table the talking opened in an irregular manner. Sir Richard Dytchley, who had known Lady Fyfield many years, and was afraid that some unlucky turn might bring their principles into collision, much to his own disadvantage, began making some remarks to Lady Oxborough inclusively about the Archæological Meeting and the intelligent foreigner, in hopes of being thus able to get a fair start on safe ground. Sir Roger, being thereby disengaged, became third in a desultory dialogue, in which Miss Exmore did the greater part. Presently Sir Richard, having, as he thought, got his fair start, devoted his attention to Lady Fyfield, Sir Roger began his conversational duties to Lady Oxborough, and Miss Exmore went on with the desultory dialogue.

The handsome young man grew tired of the desultoriness, and tried to interest her in the pictures at the Royal Academy, of which he spoke with taste and judgment. She listened for a while with sullen toleration, became gradually impatient, sitting square with her eyes fixed on the tablecloth, and at last put an end to his artistic disquisition by saying sharply :—

“You know I care for nothing in the world but hunting.”

“All right !” said he with a short equivocal laugh, that might indicate pleasure, amusement, admiration, disappoint-

ment, mere surprise, or the breaking up of a half-formed illusion.

"Well," said she, "are you going to talk? I want to be amused, and not bored about painters, and fiddlers, and poetry, and all that sort of trash. Tell me something in the way of sport, if you can."

"Well, then," said he, smiling stiffly, "I heard yesterday that there had been a badger 'drawed' in your neighbourhood."

She noticed the smile, and coloured angrily; but at that moment Sir Roger called out across the table to Everard.

"By-the-bye, Freville, you ought to know your relative."

"I remember being at Freville Chase once, when I was a boy," said the handsome young man to Everard; "and I was just thinking that I remembered your face."

"Who is he?" said the red whiskered man to Mrs. Atherstone, looking in the direction of the last speaker.

"Lord de Freville's only son," said she. "No—by-the-by I am wrong—the present Lord is his uncle, and has no children."

"A distant relation to Mr. Everard Freville, isn't it?"

"Yes. The head of the family apostatised in the reign of William III., and his next brother did not. Mr. Freville, of Freville Chase, is descended from the one who did not."

She little knew what she was bringing on herself by this curt statement of facts. The red-whiskered man turned out to be a very tiresome sort of half-finished convert, whom Lady Dytchley had invited to stay at Netherwood, in the hope that his spiritual priggishness and utter want of discretion might help her to illustrate the most disagreeable view of Catholicity before Ida. No sooner had Mrs. Atherstone inadvertently given him the cue, then he launched forth according to his own measure of things, dashing off in less than five minutes many crude theories on matters which he had neither the right to judge nor the knowledge to understand. When he began to talk of candlesticks and thuribles Mrs. Atherstone began to lose patience, but when he wanted to show his loyalty towards the Holy See by teaching the Pope, she said:—

"Oh yes. You have a great deal to learn. I daresay I had too; but then I am so much older than you. I am an old woman, born in the last century; and you will, I am

sure, not be angry if I take the privilege of my old age and give you a word of advice. A convert has everything to learn and nothing to teach. We have not only to learn the Catechism, but also to acquire the habit of thinking, feeling, seeing, judging, understanding as a Catholic. You have not yet acquired that habit. Your mind wants balancing. Excuse me—you are too busy. You mean to be as loyal as possible, but in fact you set up to teach the Church."

The red-whiskered man did not appreciate her advice, but was much quieter after she had delivered it.

In the meanwhile Everard was trying to make the most of his opportunity, such as it was ; but he and Ida were badly placed. Mrs. Atherstone certainly kept the ears of the red-whiskered man, on Ida's left, fully employed ; but then Lady Dytchley sat opposite and watched her at short, uncertain intervals.

The fish was now being handed round, and De Beaufoy was preparing to attract Lady Dytchley's attention by a series of respectful annoyances, whilst his wife, Lady Fyfield, with equal urbanity, caused Sir Richard to wish himself anywhere, rather than sitting by her.

De Beaufoy's first move had been to notice the beauty of Ida and ask who she was, as if he had not recognised her ; by which opening manoeuvre he at once insured a favourable hearing. Lady Dytchley cast her eyes downwards, to hide the pleasure she felt them express, and said : "She is my eldest daughter, Ida. Don't you remember her?"

To which De Beaufoy replied, "Of course. How stupid of me. But she was a child when I saw her last, and the fulfilment has even exceeded the promise."

He then purposely talked of other things, taking care to speak of places and people within the county, and leading the conversation by imperceptible turns up to Freville Chase. When they had reached that point he paused for a moment, as if the name of the place had reminded him of something too indifferent to be recollected without an effort.

"I don't think I have been there since his father died," said he, "or even seen it, except when the hounds went by, or we tried the gorse at the back of the house ; and I seldom went to the meets on that side, for the country about is full of rabbit holes and small blind fences, that one's horse tumbles into without giving one the pleasure

of a respectable jump or the honour of an orthodox fall."

"Yes. It *is* a dreadful country for hunting," said Lady Dytchley in an irascibly sympathising tone of voice.

"That will do to balance what is coming," thought De Beaufoy. "She hates the place because it is his."

"But what an exceptionally interesting old place it is," he said—"the old Chase, unaltered so far as it remains, from what it was five hundred years ago, and the old historic house with its individual character stamped on every stone. I don't know one the least like it. I have not seen young Freville since he was a boy. I must introduce myself to him; for I knew his father before he married, when I first knew your husband. He and I were small boys, and Freville four or five years older. My mother was living at Hazeley then, as I did afterwards till I found out that I had no business there."

"Oh yes—I was so sorry," said Lady Dytchley.

"I am much happier where I am, I assure you," answered De Beaufoy, "and much more at home on my own family property than in a place that somehow or other always made me feel as if I had no right to it, though of course I had no idea that such was the case till three years ago."

"It is very good of you to feel it so, but still"—answered Lady Dytchley, who could not open her mind so far as to understand how the loss of a property could, on any possible grounds, be otherwise than the greatest of evils.

"I am much happier as I am," said he; "and Reginald Sherborne is a much better representative of everything worth representing than I was. But we were talking about former days. I remember Freville all that time ago; and afterwards, when I was older, I recollect some very pleasant days' shooting there. There used to be lots of rabbits in those days."

"And that is nearly all the game there is," remarked Lady Dytchley, darting a quick angry glance across the table.

"Well, I used to enjoy it very much, I remember," said De Beaufoy, not appearing to notice the missile. "I don't care about so much preserving; but" (and now the respectful annoyances came in with the entrées), "I do love an old place that is redolent of the days when men were men, and women were women, instead of trying to be horsebreakers or imitating everything that they ought to be ashamed of having

even heard of; when both were strong in their respective spheres because Christianity had not then died out of social life as it bids fair to do now. Above all, I love an old place where Englishmen kept the faith through crushing persecutions, instead of apostatising at the beck of a Tudor or crouching to a Dutch stadtholder"—

Here he checked himself for a moment preceptibly, and added in a parenthesis, "*You* know all this very well—I should not have said it to other ladies, but I remember your knowledge of history."

He remembered nothing of the kind, and felt rather scrupulous about having let so rash a statement escape him unawares; but she took the compliment so naturally that his conscience was comforted, and, as she made no remark, he said:—

"Those times, like the times that preceded and made them possible, have passed into history. We have now to do with the people who are living and acting among us, and it is pleasant to see the higher types. They are not common: but, if I know anything of physiognomy (and I have studied it a good deal by practical experience) there is one opposite you."

"Everard? Oh yes—he is very good and all that," said Lady Dytchley, turning her attention to the *suprême de volaille* suddenly.

"Yes—as you say, all that," answered De Beaufoy. "It is just what I judged him to be—only you have expressed it so much better—very much 'all that'—all that which I wanted to express, and you have put it into five words."

For an instant she knew not what to make of this remarkable interpretation, so different from what she had meant, and was half inclined to resent it; but inasmuch as there was not the slightest trace either of fun or satire perceptible on his countenance, the compliment took its place by the side of its predecessor as a tribute to her ability.

"'Soft sawder and human natur' " thought De Beaufoy: "now is my time."

"As I have known you ever since you married," said he, "and your husband nearly all my life, it gives me real pleasure to congratulate you both, and especially yourself. All I hear of Freville confirms what my judgment tells me, that he is one of the few to whom a wise and anxious mother

may safely entrust her child. Believe me (I speak as a man who knows men as they are), a really satisfactory husband was never so difficult to find as now. Habitual club-life, the restless luxury of modern country houses, and that inclination to shirk all restraint which makes people selfish in society, unfit for domestic life, and saps the foundations of Christianity in their souls, have brought things to this, that if marriage might once be called a lottery, it is now more like a roulette table—so many and so terrible are the adverse chances.”

“It is unfortunately too true,” said she. “That sort of thing has spoiled the young men of the day dreadfully. They don’t go to church or anything—half of them—I am afraid : and so few of the younger sons care to be clergymen now. I don’t know what is to become of the family livings by and-by, I am sure.”

“That will be a serious consideration,” said De Beaufoy with imperturbable gravity.

“Yes, indeed,” she replied ; “but ” (and here she paused for a moment or two) “after all, Everard is not the only good man in the world.”

“Certainly not : it would be a bad look-out for the world if he were. But just compare him with others—with the better specimens, I mean. Take for an instance Lord Oxborough’s eldest son ”——

“I don’t see that at all,” interrupted Lady Dytchley.

“Just as I suspected,” thought De Beaufoy.

“He is quite as good as Everard—quite,” she added, her voice trembling with suppressed anger.

“No doubt he is a model young man,” answered De Beaufoy. “I don’t deny it for a moment. But that is the strongest proof of what I say.”

“You are getting beyond me—I can’t follow your casuistry.”

“Casuistry ? Well, I am glad you view the matter as a case of conscience. But what I was saying is very simple. One compares Freville with the best specimen of a young man one can think of, and one finds him unquestionably superior. What then must be the difference between him and less good specimens, who are the majority ? ”

“But I don’t see the difference. He is quite as good as Everard. It is only because he is not a Catholic that you talk in this way.”

"On the contrary, I always make more allowance for Protestants than for Catholics, because their difficulties are so much greater and their advantages so much less."

"That is your way of putting it, to make me in the wrong."

"I can't please you any way. Don't you see that I am handicapping them, and weighting Freville more than the other man?"

"There, now. I have had enough of it. You always were the most teasing person I ever knew. Do talk of something else."

"With pleasure, but *au bout du compte*, I have made characters and countenances a special study all my life, I have had a long experience of human nature, and I have never yet seen a man who impressed me so favourably as Freville."

"Yes, yes; I said he was very good. What do you want me to say?"

"Nothing. I was only taking the privilege of an old friend to say how much I admire the wisdom of your choice."

"But suppose I don't care about it?"

"I am not going to suppose anything of the sort: it would be a great impertinence in me to suppose that you could be anything less than my long acquaintance entitles me to believe."

"Less than what?"

"Less than yourself."

"And what am I then, pray?"

"A sensible woman."

"And suppose I don't care about the marriage—had rather it were somebody else—no one in particular, but somebody else, and only tolerate it because it has gone on so long, and his father was an old friend of Sir Richard's, and all that. What would you say of me then?"

"That you were less wise than I believe you to be. But I am not going to suppose anything of the sort. I have known you many years, and I have lived too long to mistake a joke for a serious opinion."

"But I am not joking, I tell you. When will you believe what I say? It really is too provoking. You have known me long enough to have found out that I know what I mean and am not to be turned away from it."

"Certainly I do" (and so does her contemptible husband,

he added internally, "who has made her what she is,) but then I must be sure that you are in earnest, and in this case I am sure that you are not."

"You are determined to make me angry, whether I will or not. I say that I don't like the marriage, and only submit to it out of"—

"Holy obedience. Well! there can be no better motive. No doubt the clergyman of the parish, who, of course is your spiritual adviser, has told you that, considering all the"—

"Nonsense! What has the clergyman of the parish to do with Ida's marriage?"

"Why, to say the truth, I couldn't exactly say."

"You always were the most provoking man in the world, and I am very glad you are not at Hazeley—that I am."

"My dear Lady Dytechley, we are really agreeing on every point. It is a pity that you should not see it."

They went on talking in this way during the whole of dinner-time, till the ladies left the dining-room; but we had better see what Lady Fyfield was saying to Sir Richard.

The latter had fondly imagined that, by transferring his remarks about the Archæological Meeting and the intelligent foreigner from Lady Oxborough to Lady Fyfield, he had at least secured a good start; but it so happened that, whilst he was searching his mind for a safe idea, Lady Fyfield asked him who he supposed the said foreigner was; to which he replied, "Some professor, I should think." Whereupon, as he was again searching for a safe idea, she remarked that there were professors and professors, and that many of them professed infidelity; to which he, not knowing what else to say, incautiously replied that the one in question appeared to be a liberal-minded sort of man: which brought upon him the troublesome question, "In what sense do you mean?"

Baronets have been very unjustly supposed to be more tenacious of their precedence than other people. Probably the libel arose from some facetious attempt at doggerel—about

*A supposed Sir Harry.
Who was too proud to marry;*

as Sternhold and Hopkins made the tents black, to rhyme with slack (see Ward's "Reformation"); but however that may be, it is certain that Sir Richard Dytechley would have been thankful to resign the bloody hand for that evening, in

order to be anywhere rather than where he was. He looked about, hoping that some one would say something to him ; but every one was engaged either in talking or eating, and Lady Fyfield was waiting to know in what sense he considered the intelligent foreigner to be liberal-minded. Being thus cast upon his own resources, the idea came into his mind that, as no one would interrupt him, he would interrupt himself, and he said cheerfully :—

“ Oh ! well, in the usual sense—liberal-minded, liberally disposed towards others. By-the-by, have you seen anything lately of those friends of yours (he was a Frenchman, I think) who were staying with you some years ago ? I can’t remember their names.”

“ I know who you mean,” answered Lady Fyfield. “ She was a friend of a friend of mine ; but I saw very little of them, and what I have heard since has not made me wish to know them any better.”

“ Dear me ! I am sorry for that—they seemed to be pleasant people.”

“ It is one of those painful cases that—but I think we had better talk of something else. I should like to know how your foreigner was liberal-minded—whether in good or bad sense.”

“ No, no—I assure you,” said he with much alacrity. “ You were telling it so well, as you always do. Really, I should like to hear it.”

“ Are you quite sure ? ” said she gravely. Don’t complain afterwards.”

“ What on earth *is* she going to say ? ” thought Sir Richard. “ But I *must* hear something, and it can’t be as awkward as having to say what I mean by liberal-minded, which I don’t know ”——

“ Or, rather don’t want to know,” said his conscience ; whereat he shook himself together and asked her to proceed.

“ It is,” said she, “ one of those painful cases that—do you insist on hearing it ? ”

“ I should *like* to do so,” he replied, feeling sure that, at the worst, he was choosing the least of two evils.

“ It is one of those cases that show the danger of acting in opposition to the Church. He made a mixed marriage and grew careless. His wife’s will was stronger than his, and she was consistent, which he was not. The result is that he will

have to answer before Almighty God for betraying the souls of his children."

"God bless me! upon my word now!—D——n it!" said Sir Richard to his beloved self. "What the devil is a man to do, beset in the way I am? Confound that fellow Everard! I know he will get me into a corner one of these days, and bother me to say something definite—but I won't. And De Beaufoy—he has known me so long that he will think himself privileged to be a nuisance. He's full of that sort of thing, and no doubt put his wife up to it. What does the woman want? To persuade me to, to—not to leave things alone? Very likely indeed—and have to drive home with one's wife afterwards!"

"That is all I know about them," said Lady Fyfield.

"I wish you didn't know as much about *me*," thought Sir Richard; but he made a desperate effort and said.

"Oh! oh! very charm—I mean very unfortunate. But you know, my dear Lady Fyfield, we must not judge others—the Church tells us so—and I am sure that I know many cases of all kinds where things appear (don't you know?) appear quite different and all that. I daresay that I myself have been misjudged in, in—in that way, you know."

"I am not judging any one. I state the facts," answered Lady Fyfield.

"Yes, exactly. To be sure you did; but I only meant to say that, you know, people have misjudged me—all in kindness, but still they have misjudged me—and I should be sorry that you, for whom I have so great a respect, should think anything, you know."

"About what?"

"Well, you know—about what I said. People are not fair about me. My daughters can see (don't you know?) what is right, and all that, when they are—are married. They have had their opportunities, and I am in a very awkward position."

"But I have not been speaking of your affairs,—I have nothing to do with them. You must not think that I was taking the liberty of lecturing you, when I only answered your question about the people you remembered meeting at my house some years ago."

"Oh no! I didn't mean that: and I have known you so long that I am sure I should have felt honoured by your

taking the trouble to say what you thought right. But I thought you might have heard it said that I had done wrong about my daughters, and I should be sorry you should think so. You see it's an uncommonly awkward position. A mother, you know, has everything to do with them, and—and there it is."

"Forgive me for saying so—I tried all I could to avoid the subject—but was there not an agreement about that?"

"Well, there was ; but what is one to do when"—

Lady Fyfield fixed her eyes calmly upon his, and said, "That is a matter which concerns your own soul, at your own peril. God will not be mocked. Now let us talk of something else."

In the meanwhile Everard, being uninterrupted, except by an occasional look-out from Lady Dytechley, did not fail to take advantage of the times and opportunities for which he had so long waited in vain. As soon as they were seated he whispered, "Have you done anything about it?"

"Not yet ; but I will, indeed I will," answered Ida, "*Do* have confidence in me or I shall go mad. I have borne enough already to make me so ; and if you"—

"*I have* confidence in you—the fullest confidence. What would become of me, if I had not, when I have staked the happiness of my whole life on you ? But the temptation to delay, is in your case, very great and deceptive."

"That man who came with us—happily he goes away to-morrow—has hitherto made it impossible : he has taken up one's time so. And he is so tiresome and foolish, though he means well, that he does harm. My mother keeps pointing him out to me triumphantly as a specimen of what Catholics, all but my father, really are when they are not pretending to be different."

"I have met the fellow. He is an ass. I wonder the Protestant Alliance doesn't buy him and show him about, to bring converts into contempt. But, my own Ida, is he not a living proof that the grace of God is sufficient even for the weak ? That man, as you see, has neither brains nor strength of character, and yet he gave up the only career he was capable of, and straitened his means very much, to obey the evident will of God. He is a poor silly fellow naturally, and will do some harm by his want of ballast, but he has been wise in what concerns the end for which he was created."

As Mrs. Atherstone was then trying to put a little more ballast into the man in question, it may be supposed that these remarks were not overheard, notwithstanding the acoustic properties which our own name or its descriptive equivalent is said to possess. Everard interiorly thanked the red-whiskered man for having enabled him to say what he wanted to say, and looking into Ida's eyes, listened anxiously. She became very pale, and spoke in broken half sentences.

"It is very true," she said, "true as everything you have told me. It is the firmness of will that is wanting, the firmness to choose (as you once told me, I remember) the least of two evils, the evil that only hurts oneself and makes one misunderstood, rather than the evil that is evil in itself and against the command of God. I am in a terrible position : you don't know, cannot know how bad it is, for you are not there. Dearest Everard, help me, pray for me. My mother keeps on telling me that, when we are married, I can do as I like about it, and gives me all kinds of reasons why I ought not to take the step before ; but I feel that I am acting a lie by remaining as I am. It would be acting falsely towards God, and making people judge you wrongly too, if I were to put it off till afterwards."

"Don't mind about me," said Everard. "People will not take me for a liberal Catholic anyhow ; and besides, I don't care what they think. The reason why you should act at once is, that God has given you the grace to feel the necessity of doing so. Don't, I entreat you, be influenced by any other consideration."

"I will not : I promise you I will not. But still I *must* feel how dreadful it would be to be the means of making you seem to act against your principles."

"My own dearest Ida, do rest assured that I have the most complete confidence in you, and that, if it were for your good to wait till we are married, I should, without any scruple whatever, or fear of being misjudged, advise you to do so. I advise as I do simply on your account."

"I know you do : you are always so unselfish. But—I should like it to be for yourself too."

"And so it is, of course ; for my happiness is one with yours. For my sake, then, do what will satisfy your conscience and leave you nothing to regret. When Tarquin

refused to give the price asked for the sibylline books the sibyl burned three, and again three more, and he had to give the same price at last for three instead of nine. The same thing happens if we delay to accept the grace of God : we sacrifice as much in the end, and lose merit."

"I have been very wrong to put it off as I have."

"No ; you have done your best hitherto. But now I entreat you for your own sake "——

"And yours too—*do* let me feel that."

"I mean for the sake of your own peace of mind. You are very sensitive, and would, I know, reproach yourself afterwards, if you were to let anything turn you aside from a known duty. The delay that appeared natural and unavoidable at the time would become magnified in your mind, and torment you with unmanageable scruples on the very threshold of the faith. Surely that is 'for me too.'"

"It shall be done to-morrow," said Ida very distinctly. "It shall be known to-night," if that man will only go home outside."

Here we will leave them, for the rest of their conversation was more interesting to themselves than it would be to the reader : but, before doing so, it may not be amiss to take a passing glance at both and see whether their outward appearance was what we might have expected.

Everard was, as we have seen, moderately tall, powerfully and gracefully built. He had rich brown hair, with a tinge of gold in it, a silky pointed beard, eyes of very dark gray. His eyebrows and eyelashes were darker than his hair, and strongly pencilled, contrasting with a complexion that was fair and somewhat pale. His nose was classically formed, and rather more Roman than Greek ; his mouth strongly chiselled and singularly expressive. The general expression of his whole countenance, and more or less of every feature, indicated balance of mind, purity of soul, depth of feeling and strength of will.

If you observed him attentively, and were expert in reading countenances, you would have no doubt as to the strength of his will or the intensity of his love for Ida Dytechley : you could see that, if by any means the two last qualities were forced into apposition as regarded her, his will would control his actions, his words, and, in an exceptional degree, his thoughts, but would be powerless over his heart.

Ida was as lovely a girl as imagination could create. She was too beautiful to be generally appreciated without some puffing ; for the world of our days likes to be startled by sharp contrasts of mind and features, stimulated by angularities, or persuaded by clamour. She was of middle height, graceful in form and movement, distinctively feminine in everything she said, did, or thought. Her complexion was richly fair, her eyes were of a deep and transparent blue, her hair was golden and luxuriant, her voice melodious, with a soft ring in it that became softer and more intense when she was talking to Everard. In her voice, in her eyes, in the untraceable curve of her mouth, there was the evidence of strong deep feeling, sensitiveness that only needed protection, a will that might grow strong or break down, but would not bend, a character that was full of capabilities, and would become strong if allowed to expand with her affections. Taking them both, as they were by nature and accident, you would come to no other conclusion than this :—that Everard was a necessity to her, and she to him. When at last the signal was given that separated them, she said, "I have been so happy ;" and he answered, "We have."

Which was more than Sir Richard and Lady Dytchley could have said, especially the former, who between his dread of what Lady Fyfield might cause his conscience to tell him, his much greater dread that his wife should cause him to reveal the same, and the certain knowledge that he must, in any case, not only drive home with the latter, but remain there at her disposal, had been sitting on thorns, or rather spikes, during the last two hours. Lady Dytchley was (to use a popular mode of expression) in a temper, by reason of the discrepancy between her convictions and her wishes. De Beaufoy had simply made her acknowledge to herself what she had known before without acknowledging. She agreed with every word he had said about Everard, and hated De Beaufoy for having compelled her to feel that she did so agree.

As soon as the ladies had left the dining-room, Hubert Freville went to the other side of the table and sat down by Everard.

"I am so glad to have met you again," he said. "Do you remember mounting me on your pony, and my coming to grief in a ditch ?"

"Yes. Come and stay with me when you have finished your visit," said Everard, who felt a strange kind of interest in him, for no particular reason that he could as yet discover.

"He is very good looking," thought he; "but what do I care for that?—He has a frank unaffected manner—and so have others; but I never thought of asking them to Freville Chase the first time I saw them."

Hubert Freville was certainly very good-looking, and something more. His features were not so symmetrical as Everard's, but more striking. He was taller, built in sharper curves, more evident. His hair was jet black; his eyes were also black, with a varying light in them, and were more habitually expressive than those of his distant relative because they were less under control. His countenance betokened a powerful and generous nature, a temperament strongly nervous and sanguine, intellectual capacity above the average, with a possibly dangerous predominance of imagination, a character that was complete in its parts, but not yet properly shaped, and required training rather than development. His manner was earnest, unaffected, thoroughly natural, with the additional quality, so attractive and now so rare, of causing you to feel that he was giving you his whole attention and had pleasure in doing so. He was essentially well-bred, and had the nearly obsolete habit of recalling some pleasant remembrance whenever he met anyone whom he had known before. After running through a series of boyish recollections connected with his visit to Freville Chase he said:—

"I had bad luck at dinner. After one has stayed four days with people, and exhausted all available subjects, one hardly cares to be put next them. Besides, one gets tired of that sort of thing. I hate to see a girl trying to look like a third-rate horsebreaker, and talking like a schoolboy who wants to astonish his sisters. Do you know Miss Exmore well?"

"No; very slightly. What with having been abroad a good deal, and one thing and another—but I see I must pass the wine—what with one thing and another, I don't know my neighbours as well as I ought."

"There is not much to know in her. When you have gone through her list of short slangy sentences and solved

the problem whether she is most like a boyish woman or is a feminine boy, you have done all."

Everard felt no inclination to be Master of the Sentences in that sense; but having, by this time, an intuitive perception, without any direct evidence, that Hubert Freville would be the better for a judiciously moderative treatment, he answered accordingly.

"Poor girl!" he said, "I fancy she has had a bad chance in that way. Her mother, they say, brings fast men of the period to shoot and hang about, taking them for what they ought to be, because she had danced with some of their fathers, and some of their uncles had married some of her bridesmaids; and so, you see, Miss Exmore, who, I dare say, would make a very good wife if she had had anything like a fair chance, has picked up all this rubbish in her simplicity. I don't like judging in particular cases of real or pretended fastness, and I always try to think of them as charitably as possible, because we are, as a rule, so very ignorant of the causes that have produced it; but as to the thing itself, there can be no doubt about it, in the mind of any one who thinks at all. It is the most dangerous folly that has crept into social life, for it poisons the wells"——

"And is repulsive to those who encourage it. Blackguards take pleasure in it, and fools grin, but the better sort are simply scared away from marriage by what they see."

"Yes. Miss Exmore only imitates the outside of bad examples, as a child takes a tin sword and pretends to be a highwayman; but the fastness of the day means more than that. The real thing is nothing else than a canker, which, if it continues long, will sap the very foundations of society."

"I know this," said Hubert, speaking slowly and with unwon'ted gravity. "Some of the best men I know—men who long to be married, and would be model husbands if they had the chance, are simply bewildered by the prospect before them, and keep on looking out in hopeless perplexity, like a person in a haunted room, who doubts, after a while, whether the white thing he sees is a window-curtain or a ghost."

"I am not surprised at their feeling the risk," answered Everard. "They should remember, however that men are the most to blame for this state of things, or, at anyrate, have been. No doubt the better sort lament it now, and the

more cautious are alarmed : but it is certain that men were fast before women showed the slightest symptom of fastness ; and if man is the nobler animal—which my own experience would tempt me to doubt—what can you expect from their bad example ? Joking apart, evil communication always proceeds originally from the stronger, never from the weaker.”

“Dytchley, will you pass the wine ?” said Sir Roger, in a cheery voice. “Your good story has kept it down there too long.”

“What the good story was the narrator knows not, neither did Sir Richard, who had never told one in his life ; but Sir Roger had once heard him try to do so, and his amiable imagination always enabled him to make use of that attempt whenever he wanted an excuse to say something pleasant.

“Is that Sir Richard Dytchley ?” asked Hubert.

Everard, not without secret misgivings as to what might follow, acknowledged the identity.

“He was your guardian—wasn’t he ?”

“Yes ; and a very careful one.”

“I should think so,” said Hubert, fixing his large and penetrating eyes on him ; whereat Sir Richard said confidentially to himself :—

“God bless me ! I hope he didn’t overhear what Lady Fyfield, somehow or other—I don’t know—made me say.”

“He would be careful,” said Hubert, “and honourable in all business matters, but shady if he were called upon to stand up for anything. Tell me (I oughtn’t to ask it) but”——

“Go on,” said Everard, adding in his own mind, “I foresee what the question will be ; but I want to give him his head, and see what he is made of.”

“Well then,” said Hubert, “isn’t he a bit of a cad about his religion ?”

Everard, who had not unfrequently affirmed the fact unawares to himself, and felt that an evasive answer or misleading excuses would only do harm, thought for a moment, and said, “I will answer your question as openly as possible, for I see that something higher than curiosity makes you ask it : but try to get a little more out of earshot.”

Hubert pretended to examine the flowers in the *épergne*, and Everard, after having drawn his chair in the same direction, said :—

"He is weak and puzzle-minded, and he married a Protestant who is neither the one nor the other. She has made use of her will against his conscience, and he has not made use of the little will he has to protect it."

"I see," said Hubert. "In fact, by making his own conscience ridiculous he has helped a good deal to set hers in opposition to it."

"Yes," said Everard, "he has certainly helped to form her conscience and set it, such as it may be, against his own. That is the long and short of it—and all I have to tell."

"If he had acted like a man," said Hubert, "and kept his conscience at all straight, there would have been no difficulty about it. I can understand a marriage of a Catholic and a Protestant."——

"Can you?" said Everard. "I can't."

"Well, if they agree on everything but the one point which, in reality, concerns the indivisible conscience of each."——

"But, my dear fellow, the married owners of those two indivisible consciences are made one, in a Christian sense, by a really Christian marriage, and therefore become, in that sense, indivisible. How can a husband and wife be said, with any propriety of language, to be one, if they are two in what concerns them most and for ever?"

"I should like to have it out with you at leisure, and here we are, getting up to go to the drawing room," said Hubert after a long pause. "You see I am a Protestant, whatever that may mean—for I never could get an intelligible explanation of what it is, except that one is *not* a Catholic—and so perhaps we may be talking at cross purposes."

"Well, then, come and stay at Freville Chase. When will you come?"

"On Saturday, if that will suit you."

"On Saturday then, I shall expect you, and you shall have it out as much as you like."

"Freville," said De Beaufoy, joining them on their way to the drawing room. "I am so glad to meet you again. You won't know me, I daresay; but I remember you very well when you were a small boy, and I have passed many pleasant days at Freville Chase with your father and mother."

"I remember you perfectly well," answered Everard.

"I should have known you anywhere. How long are you and Lady Fyfield staying at Hazeley?"

"A fortnight—perhaps more."

"When you go, come to Freville Chase."

"I am afraid I shall be engaged then: but I should like it very much."

"Do if you can," said Everard as they entered the drawing-room: "or, at any rate, don't fail me the next time you come to Hazeley."

There was not much conversation in the drawing room. Sir Richard's main object was to be in the background. Lady Dytechley sulked behind her fan, and made the curate talk to Ida about lawn-tennis, to keep Everard away. Hubert Freville was tired of Miss Exmore, and she of him. Sir Roger did his best, but found it a hopeless case, he knew not why. De Beaufoy found it equally hopeless, and did know why.

"It's the temper of that big woman," he said in a low voice to Mrs. Sherborne: "she would spoil any party in spite of every one, for she has not self-control enough about her to sulk like a lady."

The priest had gone home, and Lady Oxborough wanted to do likewise, the two maiden ladies had talked themselves out, and the burly youth stared in vague wonderment at Mrs. Atherstone, who was tired and thinking of the late untoward events at the Four Ways, while Lord Oxborough was thinking of nothing and saying as much. Mrs. Sherborne began to try what music would do, and went about in search of the same; whereupon Sir Richard said:—

"Do you know, Everard can sing uncommonly well. He has got a capital voice—tenor they call it, and learnt from an old fellow at Naples—one of the old school, that didn't make people bawl as they do now."

Everard, being brought out, verified the statement by singing "*Una furtiva lagrima*," in a manner that recalled the better days of Italian teaching. Then Miss Exmore sang a ballad about "Breakers on a rock," and the curate whistled something, accompanied by one of the two maiden ladies. By the time the whistling had come to an end the carriages were announced.

Then Sir Richard came forth jauntily, struck by a sudden thought that the presence of the red-whiskered man would

ensure him a safe drive home and by reason of the distance, which was nine miles and a half, help to clear away from his wife's mind any inconvenient recollections or suspicions that might happen to be lying about there.

The carriage was an old family coach, very convenient for ladies' dresses ; but, unfortunately for Sir Richard, it had a rumble behind, no less convenient for smoking.

"Surely he's not going to"—he exclaimed, as he caught sight of his protector preparing to climb into that comfortable seat. "I say—don't go outside, whatever you do. It's as cold as"—

"I never knew a hotter August night," remarked Lady Dytchley, in a tone that made him redouble his efforts.

"It's the heavy dew I mean, out of a hot room and"—

"The dew comes out of the room?" said she, with a short and (to him) very unpleasant laugh.

"No, no ; it's the hot vapour that does the mischief—I can see it over the park.

"When you are looking the other way," said she.

"Upon my word it is so, though. Come inside—there's a good fellow ! You can smoke in the old billiard room, you know."

A voice from the rumble answered cheerfully, "Thank you very much, it is so kind of you to think of it. But we are stopping the way."

"Well, then, I will come and keep you company," answered Sir Richard, opening the door.

"Don't you hear that we are stopping the way?" said Lady Dytchley.

As if in illustration of the fact, Everard's horse reared two or three times and finally backed on the Hazeley carriage, which backed on the fly, which backed on the curate, who ran against the burly youth, knocking his pipe out of his mouth and causing him to swear strange oaths.

"Don't you see what is happening?" said Lady Dytchley. "We shall be the death of everybody, all owing to that horse of Everard's."

"My dear," answered Sir Richard, "if Everard's horse is the cause of it, how can we be? Do let me now"—

"Stuff ! what has that to do with it? Drive on, will you?"

The family coach began to move, and Sir Richard, impressed with the idea that he was driving home with his wife

after having said, in spite of himself, things not adapted for her ears, began to be talkative, thinking that a little harmless pleasantry might perhaps be useful in the way of prevention.

"It was a very pleasant party," he said. "I always like their parties, and Mrs. Atherstone is worth going any distance to see. I believe she is the Wandering Jew turned into a woman."

"Only she lived at the Four Ways the greater part of her life, and never travelled but once," answered Lady Dytchley.

"Ah! well, perhaps, then, her mind wandered—that was not bad, eh?"

"Fiddlesticks! she is a great deal sharper than you, I can tell you."

"But that singing, and the fellow who stood up and whistled! I remember the tune, or something like it, when I was a boy: it was a sentimental ballad about a wreath of orange blossoms. It went in this way"—

Here he began to sing, or rather buzz:—

*I saw her but a moment,
Yet methinks I see her now,
With a wreath of orange blossoms
Upon her snowy brow.*

"Do, for mercy's sake, be quiet!" interrupted Lady Dytchley, in a voice that brought his singing to an ignominious end. "What is the matter with you? what have they been giving you?"

"Giving me eh? My dear, really, you know. Upon my word, I never did in my life."

"Who said you did? You fancy things, and then put them into my mouth. What did I say, to make you say all that?"

"Well, my dear, you see, when you asked me what they had been giving me, it looked odd, you know. That was all: It was my mistake."

This view of the case was well meant, no doubt, in his own immediate interest, and might have melted metaphorical stones; but it did not melt Lady Dytchley, and for this reason:—She had made up her mind to be angry, irrespective of what he might say or sing. She was in what used sometimes to be called a tantrum, and the tantrum was of so aggressive a nature that, contrary to her habits and

principles of acting, she could not restrain herself from venting it on him in the presence of her daughter.

When they had passed the lodge, and were making their way homewards through a silvery mass of moonlight, between two glistening lines of timbered hedgerows, the tantrum exploded.

"I can't bear him," she exclaimed with sudden vehemence, in answer to Sir Richard, who had just made the unlucky remark that he was sorry to have lost De Beaufoy from the neighbourhood. "I am very glad he had to go away."

"Are you, my dear?" said he. Well, sometimes one doesn't exactly like people, you know—something doesn't quite suit one in them. I remember once hearing an uncommonly clever man say that"—

"I say I can't bear him, and never could; and now he is more disagreeable than ever, since he went over, on purpose to marry Lady Fyfield, who ought to have been ashamed of herself—such a good and amiable and religious and charming husband as poor dear Sir Henry was."

"I must say, though, I think De Beaufoy suits her better. Don't you think so, my dear, eh?"

"That is because they have both turned. Such people always encourage each other of course. But I see she has persuaded you that she is very charming, and clever, and wise; and yet you didn't look so very comfortable when you were sitting next to her at dinner. What were you talking about?"

This was too much for Sir Richard's power of self-possession. He jumped at least an inch and a half off his seat, became very red in the face, and looked out of the window in search of something to notice, if it were only a cow asleep or a bat flying round a barn.

"What were you talking about?" repeated Lady Dytechley, who had not really cared to know, till these undignified movements stimulated her irascible curiosity.

"What a lovely night it is, to be sure!" said Sir Richard, leaning out of the window as far as possible, in order to support the fiction that he had not heard her. *Do* look now at the moon shining among the trees in that orchard—

*For 'tis my delight, of a shiny night,
At this season of the year—*

"I didn't ask you to look out of the window and sing out

of tune," said Lady Dytechley. "I asked what you and Lady Fyfield were talking about this evening, when you took her in to dinner. I should not have asked the question—for what can it signify to me? I am sure I don't feel interested enough in her to care for that: but you seem so unwilling to say, that I am sure she said, or you said, or both of you said, something you are ashamed to let me hear. Now what was it? I *must* know. I will not have people coming between us and sowing suspicion, and making mischief in all sorts of subtle and cunning ways. It is very wicked and dreadful; and you ought to know better than to listen to such things—you know you ought—I have never done so by you—never, never. And you never used to do so, never till now, since Everard has put it into your head by interfering with Ida's faith—the pure, simple, innocent faith that I instilled into her when there was no one else to give her any at all. I know he has, for I could see it in his face though Ida said it wasn't so, because she has been made to believe that black is white. I know he did it yesterday. He rode over on purpose, and saw her while I was out. Now, Ida, don't tell stories, for I know it was so. I have always been a very good wife to you, and you know it; and it is very, very hard to be treated in this way, in return for all I have done. It is enough to break one's heart. I can't—can't bear it."

Her voice failed, and she burst into a passionate flood of tears. Was this but the melting of a thunder-cloud into rain—a merely physical crisis in a fit of unresisted temper? or the evaporation of contradicted wilfulness and angry self-deception, in which better impulses gave a false colouring to its evil origin? Or was it a half hysterical outburst of natural feeling, unnaturally repressed by her marriage with a man who had no use for it and could not have called it forth, if he had? Judging by its commencement and by the prologue before the front door at Bramscote, one would be inclined to think that there was more of the rainy thunder-cloud in it than of the injured wife; but her dexterous allusion to what she had done and what Sir Richard had not done for their children, in the matter of religion, pointed to a cause quite different from either. That dexterous appeal to Ida's heart and Sir Richard's moral cowardice was not an ebullition of any kind: it was calculated, or it was the result of previous calculation.

The effect of that appeal was twofold, as befitted the very different characters of the people to whom it appealed. Sir Richard's abject desire to save himself took such exclusive possession of him, that he was not even touched by his wife's tears or the violent sobbing that followed : he was only frightened and bothered. A woman's tears will make any true man feel at least very queer, even though she be very much in the wrong ; but when a man acts like a cur about his faith, he loses half his manhood.

On Ida the effect of that cunning appeal was terrible, for a while, and dangerous to her peace of mind ; but Sir Richard relieved her from so painful a position by making another blunder.

"My dear," said he, "haven't I always left you to do as you thought best about a—you know, about Ida and Elfrida?"

"Why then, does Ida disobey?" answered Lady Dytechley in a tone that was anything but lachrymose. "I say, why does she disobey?—when you, her father, command her to do what I tell her about this, and not change her religion at the beck of a bigoted, conceited, self-sufficient"——

"My dear, my dear, I didn't quite say all that, you know, exactly. It is true that I"——

"Hold your tongue, Ida (Ida had not as yet said a word) and learn to do your duty before you teach those who have taught you everything. I say again, why does she disobey? Why does she disobey—not only me, but you—you, her father?"

"My dear, do calm yourself. I think if we talk it over quietly to-morrow, you know ; we may be able to make her understand how it stands, and"——

"I will do nothing of the kind. I insist on having her promise now that she will not listen to Everard about religion."

"That promise I never will give," said Ida, articulating the words with a distinctness, that marked the effort they had cost her.

"You wicked, wicked girl," began Lady Dytechley.

"I should be very wicked if I were to act otherwise," answered Ida. "I have always obeyed you ; and I would obey you in this, if I could do so without knowingly and wilfully disobeying God. I am sure you would never wish

me to do that. God has given me the grace to know that the Catholic Church is the one and only true Church, and with every feeling of duty and reverence to you, and a perfect readiness to obey you in everything else, I intend to see Father Johnson to-morrow and be a Catholic."

"And pray who told you that God has given you all this grace? and what do you know about it?"

"Well, my dear," interposed Sir Richard, "hadn't we better give her a little time to think it over, and—and hear what you have to say when you are not so—so tired, you know? We had a long drive to Bramscote and a lot of talking; and we shan't be home before twelve o'clock, for we stayed late."

Lady Dytchley made no reply, and they drove on through the silvery moonlight in dead silence to Netherwood. When they had reached home, Sir Richard, as he walked upstairs impressed with a profound conviction that he should presently hear more of it, came to the conclusion that, for certain reasons well known to himself, the Church was right, after all, in condemning mixed marriages.

CHAPTER VI.



THE date fixed for the Archæological Meeting was opportune for Sir Richard Dytchley and the inconvenient arrangement of the train, by which he would lose an hour and a half in changing from one line to another, very convenient. Loss of time is not a popular amusement, except when we lose it for ourselves; but paradoxically Sir Richard gained time on this occasion by losing it, for the hours of departure obliged him to leave home so early, that he was out of the way before Lady Dytchley was awake or Ida could take any steps towards being a Catholic. When he thought of the perils from which the time-table had extricated him, his heart was full of thankfulness to the Directors.

It happened however, that there was no immediate necessity for running away, and the reason was this:—

The explosion of the tantrum had either shaken Lady Dytchley's nerves, as she said herself (only she called the

tantrum a dreadful trial) or produced a bilious attack, as her maid thought : so that instead of finding himself called upon to choose between the fear of God and the fear of her, in which case the latter, being more consistent with his habits, would have had the preference, he would have found her lying on a sofa, with a Bible, a bottle of sal-volatile and a blotting book, "smiling at grief." There she lay waiting for the doctor and considering herself to resemble patience on a monument, whilst the maid held the opinion that there was more of the green and yellow melancholy which often accompanies biliousness.

Ida, who had no notion of what was going on, having been told cheerfully by the maid that Lady Dytchley was "rather tired after the long drive home, and wanted to sleep a little longer," set out for the Presbytery before the big stable clock had struck ten. It was well for her, so far as the benefit extended, that the distance was short ; for when we have struggled much between the evidences of two evils, and chosen the least, we had better not think of them again on the eve of fulfilling the choice. She walked fast, keeping her mind fixed on her resolution, and when she reached the house, rang the bell as naturally as if she were ringing the drawing-room bell ; but when the housekeeper appeared and told her that Father Johnson was away from home, her calmness came to an end suddenly. "How shall I bear the strain till to-morrow?" was the thought that rushed into her mind as she asked when he was expected home.

"Well, Miss, he is away for a fortnight," answered the housekeeper. "There is a priest here supplying for him from the College at"——

"Shall I see him?" thought Ida, as she turned from the door. "I have never seen him: but the office, not the man, is what really signifies. And after all I know very little of Father Johnson. Still I *do* know him, and not the other—and one who knows me will understand so much better. I had rather not go to a stranger. But I promised Everard not to wait, and it would be waiting to put it off when there is a priest here. Would it be waiting, when it was Father Johnson Everard wanted me to see, and he is away from home? I felt so happy when I thought I was going to see Father Johnson; but the other would know nothing about me, and perhaps misunderstand me. I should

explain myself wrongly in my agitation. What *am* I to do? If Everard were only here, to tell me what to do! Shall I turn back, turn back—presently?”

In the meantime she was walking towards home, and before she had gone a hundred yards the opportunity was made unavailable by the appearance of her younger sister.

Elfrida Dytchley was just seventeen, and looked sometimes older sometimes younger than her sister, according to the light in which you looked for the difference. Viewed as a young lady, she was, in face and manner, an overgrown child: considered as a very young woman with a possible character, her age appeared to increase under examination. So that if you sought the truth in both ways you would be likely to halt between two opinions. Her features ought to have been handsome, but were not quite so at present. Hints and unfinished beginnings of a beauty that would be rare or not be at all, promised much and puzzled the imagination. She was shorter than Ida, and stronger in everything except in her health, which had become delicate as she grew up. She had a strong and steady will, a vigorous mind struggling to develop itself, a distinct and original character chilled by the want of intelligent sympathy. No one as yet really understood her. Sir Richard, of course did not, and would have been afraid of the attempt, if the idea had occurred to him. Lady Dytchley was by nature ill-qualified for acquiring that knowledge, and totally disqualified by habit. Ida would have understood her, if each had understood herself; but self-knowledge had been carefully checked, as far as possible, in them, to the disadvantage of both, especially of Ida, who had less natural power to repair the damage. Everard would have understood her better than any one; but she had been carefully kept away from his influence, Lady Dytchley being of opinion that it was “bad enough to have him going about deceiving Ida and Elfrida, without letting him come and talk to her just as he liked.”

“They told me you were out,” said she, fixing her eyes powerfully on Ida for an instant and lowering them, as if considering what she should say and how she should say it.

“Were you looking for me?” said Ida.

“Yes; my mother is not well, and has sent for”——

“What is it? I was only told that she was tired and would get up rather later.”

"I don't know. She seems excited, and worried about something. She tells me that she feels very feverish and ill."

"Are *you* at all frightened about her?" asked Ida, who having a vivid remembrance of the tantrum, and some experience of similar explosions followed by the symptoms described, attributed little importance to the latter on this occasion.

"No, not frightened exactly; but I regret the cause of it all."

"You know it then?"

"Yes, and have known it a long while, though you never said a word to me about it."

"How could I? I have longed often and often to tell you, and show you how it is, why it cannot be otherwise, why I am certain that the Catholic religion is the only true one; but you had no inclination to hear *that*, and I could not in conscience have entered upon the subject without speaking openly."

Elfrida again fixed her eyes on her sister—dark, lustrous eyes with a strange depth of meaning in them—but remained silent.

"There is something on your mind," said Ida. "Why are you so reserved with me?"

"From the same cause that made you reserved with me. I know very well that if I speak of the course you have decided on, you *must* give your reasons, and enter into the subject; and that means questioning my own convictions, which I should not be justified in doing."

"Are you so sure that they are convictions? It strikes me that, if they were, you would not be afraid to examine them."

"Afraid?" answered Elfrida, pausing for a moment, as if searching for a connection between the thing signified and her own consciousness. "As far as I know, I should not be afraid to face anything that I felt I ought to face; but I don't feel that I ought to face this. I have no right to run the risk of being unsettled by arguments that I have not sufficient knowledge to answer. We should not be on fair terms. You have Everard to help you; but who could I apply to in that way, without making mischief between you and my mother?"

"If you really have never had any doubts at all," said

Ida, "I had rather not incur the responsibility of disturbing your mind, situated as you are ; but don't mistake facts. Everard has never spoken a word of controversy to me. Ask yourself how and when he could have done so ? The day before yesterday, when I saw him for about a quarter of an hour, or yesterday at dinner at Bramscote ? I have had no other uninterrupted conversation with him for more than ten minutes at a time, since I was old enough to understand anything about it. You must know that. How could he have talked any controversy in that time ? You could understand and judge all he has ever said to me about religion as well as any one else. He has never quoted any book on the subject, except the Gospels, or used any argument beyond the simplest appeals to common sense."

"My dear Ida, I am sure that it seems so to you ; and you are older and know more than I do. And I should take your opinion if" —

"It has nothing to do with opinion, but with faith, about which there can be no opinion at all as soon as one has it. Faith is the gift of God ; and the reasons one gives for it, when called upon to do so, are simple, and require nothing but common sense to be understood."

"That is not your way of speaking," said Elfrida. "They are Everard's words, or at least the same thing differently expressed. You would never have put it in that way."

"Well, if they are, they are plain enough ; but you are not in a state of mind to listen to them, and I should only do harm by saying any more about it. You began it, and I was obliged to answer you ; but I see that it is better to leave it alone. Whatever I said, you would tell me that Everard had put it into my head."

"Never mind how they got into your head. I was going to say that the most subtle arguments can be made to appear the most simple, if one is not qualified to deal with them."

"My dear Elfrida, it is worse than useless for me to talk to you about this. Your mind is shut against it ; and the clearer the proof the more you would say that it was only error cunningly disguised. Some day, I hope, you will see it differently ; but we had better drop the subject now."

"Never : I shall never think differently."

"That is because you don't think about it at all."

"I do think about it, or how could I feel sure one way or the other?"

"O Elfrida! you make me say what you said to me just now—'that it is not your way of speaking,' nor of thinking either. You know the difference very well between taking a thing for granted and being able to give your reasons for believing it."

"I don't take it for granted. I have read enough and thought enough about it to be so convinced, that anything I might hear the other way would have no effect in persuading me."

"You said just now that you had no right to run the risk of unsettling your convictions. How could they be unsettled, if nothing that could be said would have any effect upon you?"

"I said 'no effect in persuading,' not in unsettling."

"Elfrida, your mind is not settled, or only in the sense in which I have heard of people's affairs being settled, when it only meant that they got out of paying their debts."

"It *is* settled though; and when I say that it might be unsettled by arguments I have not the means of answering, I mean" —

"That you are afraid of believing nothing, if you are shaken in what you now profess—a remarkable way indeed of showing your confidence in what you call your convictions."

"You don't understand me yet. A thing may unsettle one's mind without touching one's convictions."

"Surely convictions are in the mind; and, if they are, how can anyone unsettle your mind without unsettling your convictions? And besides, you distinctly said 'convictions.' It is disingenuous to say a thing and then explain it away, when it suits your purpose."

"And it is not captious to bind one down to a word used inadvertently?"

"Now don't be untrue. You never thought of the inadvertence till you couldn't get out of the consequences of your words without explaining them away."

Elfrida remained silent so long that she appeared to have dropped the subject, and they both insensibly increased their pace homewards. At last she said:—

"No; I am not trying to do that."

"To do what?"

"To explain away what I said. I had no intention of doing so: surely you must know that."

"My dear Elfrida, I am sure you did not intend it ; but I am equally sure that you did so without intending it. You thought that you were bound to resist inquiry as a temptation, and when you found there was something to inquire about, you did your best to think, and make me think, that it was a mistake. I am not blaming you at all : I only see how it is."

"What I meant," said Elfrida, "was this—only I can't express it properly. One's convictions may be disturbed (I will not say unsettled, for it has another meaning) but disturbed without being taken away. If a person who had learned astronomy were to bring forward a great many scientific arguments to prove that the sun goes round the earth, your conviction that the earth goes round the sun would not be shaken ; because, though you couldn't prove it, you know very well that it can be proved, and could be proved to you, if you knew enough of the science to understand the proofs. But you would be bothered and puzzled, because you would have to listen to what you knew to be untrue, without being able to say anything except 'I can't refute what you say, but I know it is not so.'"

It was now Ida's turn to pause ; for she had heard enough from Everard to be aware that there was a sound principle here, and yet she was no less certain that it was unsound as applied to Elfrida. There was a fallacy somewhere, but where was it exactly ? and how should she answer it ?

"What do you say to *that* ?" said Elfrida. "You know more than I do, but I don't think you can answer it ; for you would say the same, if the cases were reversed."

"Can't I ?" answered Ida with sudden vehemence. "Your illustration is apt, and"—

"Forgive me, dearest Ida, but all this is Everard's."

"What does it signify whose it is, if it is true ? and, for the matter of that, all that you have said is from—never mind where, but it is not your own, and you know that as well as I do. Of course I should say the same if the cases were reversed, but why ? Because the principle would apply in my case, and does not apply in yours ; because Protestantism is, at the best, but a sect of the Universal Church"—

"Everard's again : you would never have thought of that."

"Elfrida, don't provoke me to forget reverence where it is

due, and say where your assertions come from. I say it is, at the best, but a sect of the Universal Church. Its pedigree is broken (now don't provoke me any more about Everard) and therefore it has not the right to say that doubts as to its authority are a temptation, as the Catholic Church has."

"If that were the case, of course you would be right. I have not the knowledge to refute, and you have everything at your fingers' ends."

"You know very well that I have nothing of the sort."

"Really, I beg your pardon, but I thought you had."

"Now, Elfrida, you almost force me to say what I ought not to say; but you understand what I mean without my going further. You have been helped—I must use the word, for you compel me to do so—coached up by my mother to defend the religion you were not baptized in. I have been so, too, but you the most. We have both of us heard a hundred times more on that side than I have heard on the other."

"Perhaps you are right about that: I believe you are, and I was wrong in saying otherwise. But there is something beyond argument and proofs."——

"Of course there is. There is the grace of God, without which faith is impossible; but you must take care not to put impediments in the way. I feel sure you have not as yet; but don't."

"I should think it presumptuous in me to say that I feel as I do by the grace of God"——

"Certainly."

"But I feel that there is internal evidence of that form of Christianity which I believe in."

"Form of Christianity! Do you suppose Our Lord founded His Church to be broken up into bits, varying in every direction, and yet all be part of the One and Only Faith, all part of the One Church which He promised that He would be with, even to the consummation of the world, and said that the Holy Ghost should guide to all truth? You can't say that the words refer to the Apostles, for they died eighteen hundred years ago."

"Of course not: and if they varied in essentials"——

"What are essentials?—and how are you to know what they are, when you have no authority but the letter of the

Bible and the opinion of the people who wrote and taught against the Church that traced its authority from the Apostles and had preserved the Bible for them?"

"Well, I suppose that the doctrine of the Trinity" —

"Of course. But is it, or it is not, essential whether we receive Our Lord or a piece of bread?"

Elfrida was again silent for some time. When she did speak her utterance was slow and very grave.

"Ida," she said, "I can't answer your last question: but I am not at all persuaded—which, I think you will acknowledge, proves pretty well the strength of my conviction. To me it proves more: it proves the force of irresistible truth in my soul, something so strong that my not being able to answer so startling and yet so simple an objection does not affect it in the least."

"It proves that you are in good faith, which I was sure you were, and that Almighty God has not yet given you the grace to see the truth," answered Ida. "It proves that—and nothing more, nothing more at all."

"May I say one thing to you about yourself? You are older than I, and know more, and it seems presumptuous in me to advise; but sometimes another person sees some things clearer than we can ourselves."

"Say what is in your head. Why should you hesitate? Are we strangers, that you should not speak openly to me?"

"You must not think," said Elfrida, "that because I don't agree with you about religion, I should wish you to turn aside or waver. Nothing could be further from my wishes. I cannot see that Our Lord founded a visible Church" —

"Can't you? Then what did He mean when He said, 'If he will not hear the Church, let him be as a heathen and a publican?' How is anyone to hear the Church, if no one can tell for certain where it is?"

"Well, I can't—I sometimes feel tempted to wish that I could. I can't see it, and therefore I can only follow my own conscience, and hope that you will follow yours. Now I can see that you are being very much tried, and you may find yourself—don't ask me in what way, nor why I think so—terribly puzzled how to act."

"She means by my mother," thought Ida: and this

feverish attack will be the occasion. I have need of help indeed, and Everard is away."

"It would be unbecoming in me to be more explicit," said Elfrida.

"There is no need for you to be so. I understand you too well. What would you do if you were in my place?"

"If I believed that God required me now to be a Catholic, no human power nor entreaty nor consideration of any kind whatsoever should make me miss the very first opportunity."

"And I," said Ida, "have missed mine this morning. But it is not too late—I can turn back. But then my mother—when I know she is ill, and she knows that I know it. Elfrida, I turned away from the Presbytery because a stranger was there, instead of Father Johnson"

"I dare not advise in this," answered Elfrida; "I only know what I should have done myself."

"You would not have turned away, I know. The more shame for me. Will it seem wrong, if I put off seeing my mother a little, and turn back now?"

"I cannot give direct advice against my own convictions; but if I felt as you do, I should not have come away from the Presbytery without having fulfilled the intention that took me there."

"And perhaps he has gone out, and the opportunity is lost," thought Ida, turning back and walking quickly, whilst Elfrida went on her way towards the house. "If I had taken that decided step, it would have been done, and could not be put off. Who can say what troubles I should have saved myself from?"

As the priest's house was less than half a mile from the spot where they had separated, the suspense was not long. "But why does it seem so long?" she thought, as she reached the door and rang the bell. "After all, it is not irremediable. I have gone through so much, that a little more or less makes little difference."

The housekeeper, who had seen her from the window, came quickly and said, "He went out Miss, ten minutes ago."

"Will he be back soon?"

"Not till two o'clock, or"—

"Oh! do get him. Can't I send a boy after him? I want to see him very much."

"I would, Miss, in a moment, if I knew where to send; but I don't even know in what direction he is gone."

Ida walked sadly home, thinking of the opportunity she had lost, and the troubles which that loss might entail, not only on herself but on Everard. When she had reached home she went at once to her mother's room.

Lady Dytechley received her in the most affectionate manner. There was no trace of last night's explosion, except in the outward sign of its consequences—the Bible, the bottle of sal-volatile, the blotting-book, and the sofa with her upon it at eleven o'clock in the morning.

"They said you were tired and wanted more sleep, or I should have come long ago," said Ida.

"I was sure you would," answered Lady Dytechley. "The fact is, I did try to sleep, but I felt so ill and feverish that I was obliged to give it up; so I sent Elfrida to look for you. Did she find you?"

"Yes; I wish I had known sooner that you were unwell."

"You came as soon as you did know. It is only three-quarters of an hour since Elfrida went to look for you. I suppose you were in the wood-walk—I wish I were well enough for that."

"No; I was the other side of the Lodge when she met me," said Ida.

"Coming from the village? Did you call anywhere? I mean any of the cottages?"

"Not this morning. I wanted to be back."

"Well, I believe I had better be left quite quiet for the present—I am so feverish. But, before you go, I wish to say one thing."

"That she knows where I have been, and will be more feverish unless I promise to put it off," thought Ida. "I have indeed lost my opportunity. It was my own fault."

"I didn't mean to be harsh last night," said Lady Dytechley. "I felt very strongly, and expressed myself, I am afraid, with more truthfulness than kindness. But you know that I didn't mean it. You will not mind, will you?"

"My dearest mother, how can you ask me such a thing? As if I could" —

There now, don't distress yourself. God bless you, my child. Come and see me by-and-by."

Ida left the room, strolled into the wood-walk for the benefit of its quietness, and did her best to understand the meaning of all this, but could make nothing of it, or at least nothing permanently persuasive. De Beaufoy, had he been aware of what had happened, would probably have said that the illness and the affectionate reception were more, or less; got up sequences of the tantrum, and the latter sequence an acute but not original method of discovering where Ida had been: but then he might have been mistaken, like the rest of us. Poor Ida could only see that her visit to the Presbytery was known, and the opportunity lost that would have made delay impossible.

What use Lady Dytchley made of the Bible is not recorded. It remained in the same position during the day; but, as she laid her hand upon it when she remarked to Sir Richard, after his return, at or about nine o'clock in the evening, that "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward"—which made him think of the drive home—it may be inferred that the identity of position was accidental. The sal-volatile may have had a symbolic meaning, but was a useful restorative after the exciting drive in the moonlight. The blotting-book was the most important of the three symbolical articles that lay on the sofa; for it not only represented industry in illness, duty struggling against fever or bile, the dignity of labour as an unobtrusive principle of life, but it had a special use in connection with a certain policy of which the tantrum had perhaps been the preparatory move. When Ida had left the room, in order to give her the rest that she needed, the blotting-book came forth and the adjoining table, with an inkstand on it, was pulled up to the sofa. Let no one suppose this action to imply that she was not seeking rest. On the contrary, she both sought and obtained it through the blotting-book, as was proved by the fact that her pulse decreased after she had written and sealed the following letter:—

"My dear Lady Oxborough,—

"I have been thinking over your pleasant proposal that we should join your party to the Italian lakes. I should enjoy it of all things, but I hesitated on account of not liking to leave Sir Richard alone, which he would be in September if we were away, as nothing would induce him to miss the

partridge shooting. I had no opportunity of talking to you about it yesterday evening at Bramscote, for I found it so dull with nothing but perverts to talk to, except Sir Roger, who is always nice, but he looked bored after the gentlemen came into the drawing-room, and Mrs. Sherborne, who was busy trying to amuse the people, and so I thought I would write, though I feel very ill with a sort of nervous fever owing to anxiety about Ida, who has been much troubled about Everard Freville, and is far from well, and I expect the doctor every minute. But I am sure that the thoughts of our pleasant journey will do me more good than anything, so I write to say that I have decided to go abroad as soon as you are ready to start. I feel sure that I am doing right, for I am persuaded that it will do Ida good after all the worries which that foolish arrangement between her father and his old friend Mr. Freville has brought upon her. It has been a great worry to me, as you may imagine, and the poor child looks much the worse for it all. I shall look forward to hearing from you as to the time you may find it convenient for setting out, and remain, my dear Lady Oxborough, yours most sincerely,

"Charlotte Dytechley.

"P.S.—I shall leave Elfrida at home, as she does not require the change, and it would not be right to leave Sir Richard alone."

If this letter was not a model of composition, at least it thoroughly fulfilled its purpose, which, after all, is the *finis cujus gratiâ* of a letter. Hypercritical people might say that some of her statements would not bear examination, and warm Catholic hearts on the other side of St. George's Channel might even be induced to feel that "it's lying she was;" but habitual self-deception will account for many startling statements that have an unpleasant appearance. It was true that Ida had been much troubled about Everard, and no less true that, on this particular morning, she appeared to be the worse for it. That the proposed journey would, under the circumstances, do her good, was indeed a bold statement, almost amounting to what is popularly termed a bouncer, and of course was so materially; yet if we look at it from Lady Dytechley's point of view, it will have a more charitable interpretation. She had acquired the habit of seeing things as she desired to see them, and as

no one ever raised the question of identity in that respect, her self-confidence was equal to most occasions.

When she had directed the letter and sent it downstairs, to be put into the bag, she began to agitate herself and her pulse by exciting reflections on the hardness of her case and the '*dreadful misfortune that it would be, if Ida really married Everard*' (those were her very words to herself) and the necessity of keeping him away from the Lago Maggiore—for which purpose a plan presented itself to her mind then and there.

It is not to be supposed that this excitement was a preparation for the doctor's view of her malady ; but it so happened that, during its course, the doctor arrived.

It was nearly two o'clock. At first he pronounced it to be "a little bilious derangement," and made one or two hypothetical suggestions delicately about eating rich things ; but after he had felt her pulse for the third time, and found it increase a little, while she was assuring him that she felt dreadfully feverish, he assumed a graver aspect, and told her that, although he considered it a slight attack, it might possibly turn to a nervous fever, and she must therefore keep very quiet, avoiding all excitement or worry.

"Ah ! yes. I know it is as you say," said she. "I know that I ought to do so ; but it is so difficult sometimes, and I happen to have some rather worrying things to think of just now about other people—things that worry me on their account. I am afraid I shall have to talk about them."

"You really must not," said her medical adviser, scrutinising her countenance acutely. "I don't say that it would be dangerous, but it would retard your recovery, and it *might*—I don't say it would—but it *might*, with a sensitive and excitable temperament, bring on the nervous fever which, as I said, your attack might possibly turn into."

"Well, I will try to do as you tell me. Perhaps, then, you would be so kind as to see Miss Dytchley, and tell her how it is ; for she might talk to me on that subject, as she and I have been talking of it lately."

"With pleasure," said he. It is my duty to do so. You had better not hear or think of anything that would excite or worry you, for the next three or four days."

The doctor was a man of acute but not deep intuition,

and conscientious in the same degree. Had his acuteness being adapted to penetrate below the surface, and his conscience to be less exclusive concerning his patients, his interview with Ida would have enlightened him much with regard to Lady Dytchley and her symptoms; but as it was, he only saw that she was pale, hoped that she would not overtire herself, and said what he had come to say.

He could not have chosen a worse time for such an interview (but that was not his fault) nor have expressed himself more unfortunately. When sent for, she was waiting for the hour at which the priest would return home, and while dreading a summons from her mother, feared to leave the house too soon, lest her absence might awaken suspicions and aggravate the feverish symptoms—or be thought to do so.

She found the doctor in the library, looking serious and sympathetically communicative. After a few common-place inquiries about herself, which she answered by assuring him that she was perfectly well, he said in a doctorial voice:—

“There is nothing to be alarmed about—that is, if proper care is taken. Lady Dytchley is suffering from a slight bilious attack; but she is decidedly feverish, and if she were excited—for instance, by having any subject, or, still worse, any occurrence of a painful or worrying nature brought accidentally before her, it would certainly be very much aggravated, and *might* possibly turn to a nervous fever, in which case (don’t let me alarm you unnecessarily) it *might* be a more serious matter.”

“I don’t quite understand,” said Ida with a forced calmness that he mistook for want of feeling. “Do you mean that she would be in danger?”

“Well, not positively. A patient’s recuperative powers are sometimes exceptionally strong, and hers may be so: I have been so short a time in practice about here that I have had no opportunities of becoming acquainted with her constitution. But I certainly should be very sorry to risk it—very. At present she is going on satisfactorily. If there should be—any change, if she should be worse, you will send for me.”

Having delivered this professional opinion, which did not commit him to anything, but laid the whole weight of an

uncertain responsibility on Ida, he left the room, satisfied with what he had done for his patient, and reserving all consideration for Ida till he should be called upon to think about her professionally. This principle had so completely guided his intelligence during the interview, that the idea of having any duty towards her never crossed his mind for an instant.

What was she to do? That question was now, for the first time, both serious and difficult. It is true that she did not believe in the general impression which the doctor's words were calculated to produce; for she had not failed to notice how carefully his opinion had been guarded by such reservations as, "might possibly turn to," don't let me alarm you unnecessarily." But then his last words were, "I should be very sorry to risk it—very." Risk it, how? "By any occurrence of a painful or worrying nature brought accidentally before her."

"If I had but done it this morning, when I had the opportunity," thought the poor child, "I should not have to reproach myself so bitterly now and perhaps much more hereafter. Yes—much more, whatever I do; for I cannot act right now. Everard warned me, only yesterday, against bringing upon myself painful scruples by delay. I had the chance this morning. I delayed, and this is the consequence. It was my fault, my miserable fault. If some one I could believe would only tell me to trust my own judgment, instead of the doctor's mysterious hints! I don't believe what he says and implies—he has never attended her before, and I *do* know her. But how can I venture, in the face of a doctor's opinion that he should be very sorry to risk it? And yet I might—if I were quick and lost no time. Yes!—for she evidently knew where I had been, and perhaps thought I had done what I went for. Why didn't I think of that before?"

She ran into the hall, put on the first lady's hat she found, and was already some yards from the door, when the maid, who had caught sight of her from the top of the staircase, ran out and said that Lady Dytchley wanted to see her.

She returned into the house, walking slowly, and repeating to herself as she went, "This is what that one delay has brought me to."

Lady Dytchley received her even more affectionately than before.

"I am better," she said, "and should like to be off this tiresome sofa; but the doctor will not hear of it at present. It is very annoying, particularly as I happen to have a great number of letters that want answering. We have had such lovely weather lately, and I have been enjoying it so much out of doors, besides having to finish the last volume of 'Middlemarch,' which must go back to Mudie's with the other books, that I have sadly neglected my duties in that way."

"It is *my* duty to remain here now, and do my best for her," thought Ida. "Would it were the pleasure it ought to be!"—"Can I write any letters for you?" she said. "Do let me be of use."

"Well, my darling, it would be very kind, and save me a good deal of anxiety; for some of them really ought to have been answered nearly a week ago. There is one about the votes for the Orphan Asylum, and the letter to Madame Corsette about the polonaise that fitted badly, and—oh yes, I ought to have written to Lady Oxborough and sent the money for the—what was it? I shall think of it directly, or, if you open the davenport (the keys are on the dressing-table) you will find her letter. And then there is—but I must not worry you with such a lot of writing."

"It will not tire me, indeed: do let me help you," said Ida, who felt that the day was lost and the duty clear.

"Thank you, my dear—you are always so thoughtful. There is—but you positively must not think of writing them all—there is the character of that housemaid, that I ought to have answered. There is a letter about it from a Mrs. Somebody in Eccleston Square (her letter is in this blotting book) and Lord Ledchester about the hospital ticket for the woodman's consumptive son. And I took away a photograph of Mrs. Sherborne's baby last night by mistake. I must send it back, and it would be more civil to write a line. And there are five or six regular correspondents, very old friends, that I have neglected shamefully—these are their letters in this unfortunate blotting-book. But they must keep till I am better. But I am afraid that Lady Oxborough, and the character in Eccleston Square, and the hospital ticket to be sent to Monksgallows, and (oh,

dear ! there is no end of them) Mignon the French shoemaker, and the civil service things, and the Corporation of the Sons of the Clergy, must be done."

Ida wrote them all, and had to re-write her Letter to Lady Oxborough (which was the first), owing to a natural mistake that her mother found inconvenient, as her remarks thereon will show.

"Beautifully done, my darling," said she. "But I wouldn't quite say this, I think. 'My mother desires me to say that as she is too ill to write. You see, she is an old friend, and she might think it was something serious, which I hope it is not. I would say, 'As she is suffering from a feverish attack, which makes it advisable to keep as quiet as possible, and has just remembered having omitted to send the money for the subscription she promised, I think it better that I should write for her'—and so on."

"I see. How stupid of me to have worded it so," said the innocent girl, taking another sheet of paper.

"No, no, my dear : it was very natural. But perhaps it is safer as I said."

"Very much so ; for, if the original letter had gone to the post, Lady Oxborough must have seen that Lady Dytechley's letter to her had been kept a secret from Ida, and would have been led to suspect that the latter had been "very much troubled" in a different sense from the one therein suggested.

The letters about the woodman's consumptive son, and the French shoes, and the polonaise, and the baby's photograph, and the Orphan Asylum, and the housemaid in Eccleston Square, and the Corporation of the Sons of the Clergy, occupied Ida's time till past six o'clock, after which Lady Dytechley could not refuse her offer of reading aloud some of the last volume of "Middlemarch," that must be sent back to Mudie's. By that time it was half-past seven, and the dinner bell was ringing.

"Thank you so very much, dearest Ida," said Lady Dytechley, drawing her to the sofa, and kissing her forehead. "I have tired you very much, I am afraid, and you will be late for dinner."

"I am not at all tired, and I shall be ready in a few minutes. The dinner will not be cold in such weather as this."

"You have done wonders," said Lady Dytechley. "I hope that by to-morrow or next day I may be able to begin the others. We shall see what the doctor says. You have really done wonders."

It was not too much to say that she had. The result was really wonderful, but not the fact, seeing that she had been spurred on by an intense desire to finish the duty as soon as possible, that she might as soon as possible be free to do another no less imperative and immeasurably more important.


She came back after dinner, and worked hard again, but had hardly finished the first of the five or six letters to old friends, which were required to contain an immeasurable amount of small details, when Sir Richard appeared, and, as we know, was told, in reference to his wife's patient endurance of accumulated trials, that "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." Sir Richard, who had dined at Ledchester, remained in the room, telling how much he had been interested by all he had seen and heard at the Archæological Meeting, how the intelligent foreigner was not there after all, but was no doubt engaged in some scientific explorations of a more important character, and how the red-whiskered man had been set down at the station, on his way to Belgium. When he had ended his narrative it was ten o'clock, and Lady Dytechley said, "I am very ill, and tired, and feverish. Hadn't we better go to bed?"

And thus was Ida left with the prospect of further mysterious warnings from the doctor, besides the interminable letters to old friends, the letter to the Civil Service, and three hundred closely-printed pages of "Middlemarch."





CHAPTER VII.

“N ill-marriage is a spring of ill-fortune,” says an old proverb ; and the same idea came unbidden into Sir Richard’s mind, from time to time, after his rusty conscience had been polished a little by what he had unwittingly forced Lady Fyfield to tell him : but he forgot to remember that he himself had made the spring and was responsible for the mischief it was doing. Instead of saying *meâ culpâ*, and mending his ways, he only pitied himself and went on as before. The substance of the proverb had occurred to him uncomfortably after his return from the Archæological Meeting, when he could not help recognising in the symbolical juxtaposition of the Bible, the bottle of sal-volatile, and the blotting-book, a significant sequence of the unpleasant drive home ; but being selfish, as all systematically weak people are, he only thought of himself, and applied his wife’s Biblical quotation to his own case, especially the sparks flying upward, which reminded him of the explosion in the family coach.

The next morning he went out early, saying to himself, “What is the use of bothering in this way ? What can I do but wait and see, wait and see ?

A little later in the day Ida, too, came to the conclusion that she must wait and see, but under very different circumstances, and with a very different meaning. The circumstances were that she found herself entangled in a network of accidental duties, her meaning was that the waiting should last no longer than the circumstances. Lady Dytchley’s countenance, when she came forth to her sofa, was—

*Like a lusty winter,
Frosty but kindly.*

There was a chill in her manner, warmth in her words and smile. She was less expansive, but the difference could only be felt. The doctor did his duty, as before, according to his lights, and, as before, left Ida burdened with his mysterious warnings. "Middlemarch" and the letters occupied her time all that day, and it was evident that Saturday's sun would set on her still unfinished work.

Late in the afternoon, whilst she was trying to condense the apparently unlimited information which her mother continued to dictate for the benefit of the fourth old friend, a fly, fairly loaded with luggage on the top and a servant of no particular nationality on the box, drove into the courtyard of Freville Chase. As Hubert Freville was expected about that time, according to the invitation given at Bramscote, Mrs. Roland and Anne, the upper housemaid, feeling a natural curiosity to see what he had grown to be like since his last visit, were on the look-out for his approach. As they hoped to see him at their convenience, owing to the position of a door in the hall through which the guest had to pass, we may as well take the opportunity of noticing that part of the house.

The hall was a large and lofty oak-panelled room, with crossbeams of timber, on the pendant bosses of which were shields, and other armorial emblems. The panelled walls, which ended in a dado of oak carving, were covered with banners, old family portraits, armour, stag heads, and weapons of various kinds, ancient and modern. Opposite the entrance door was a large fireplace, constructed to burn massive logs of wood, and above it a chimney-piece of carved stone, ornamented with gold and colours. On either side of the fireplace was a door leading into the long gallery, which was in fact the drawing room. This gallery was a hundred feet long, and extended along the whole south front of the house, commanding a view over the terraced gardens, the piece of water and the Chase woods beyond. It had five large bay windows, three to the south, formed by the projecting gables—two large, and a smaller one in the middle, forming the Elizabethan E—and two projecting bays at the sides. From the eastern bay window you could see one corner of the old tower where it projected behind the quadrangle on that side. If you looked out of the western bay, you would see an angle of the chapel, a myrtle-covered wall that

masked the kitchen-garden, and a line of blue hills in the distance. The ceiling of this room was richly carved, and ornamented like that in the hall, with pendant bosses delicately coloured and gilt. The walls were oak panelled, with a deep frieze work of rich carving. Below the frieze-work were family portraits representing many generations of Frevilles—two by Vandyck—and, in the best lights, about half-a-dozen early Italian pictures among which was an original Giotto ; but on the south side of the room, between the windows, where the light would have been bad for pictures, rich hangings of tapestry gave a deep and soft colouring, very gratifying to the eye. Antique cabinets, rare china, tables and chairs of curious workmanship, some of ebony and ivory, others of old Venetian carving richly gilt, completed the furniture of the room. The dining room was on the left of the entrance hall, and the library on the right. At the two corners, right and left of the entrance, were two doors with crimson velvet portières, one leading to the chapel on the west side of the court, by a long passage with rooms on the left, the other to the offices on the eastern side. In the shadow of this door and its heavy curtain Mrs. Roland and Anne looked forth, to see what the heir of the elder line was like.

Anne, being the younger and possessing the lesser dignity, made the first move by bringing her left eye in a line with the front of the portière, so that she might catch sight of Hubert Freville as he entered the hall. She took up this position while the entrance door was being opened, and kept it for about two minutes, when her head popped suddenly back, and her eyes expanded till they were as round as Giotto's O.

"Why, lor! I say—well, I never!" she exclaimed. "I always know'd he'd do something."

"What's the matter?" said Mrs. Roland, peeping in a dignified manner through the portière.

"It's him as murdered the baby," answered Anne, pulling hard at her gown.

"Hush!" answered Mrs. Roland, drawing back within the portière. "They can hear you all over the place. He didn't murder anybody, as I've told you often. There's nothing out of the way in his coming here, connected as he is with the family. It's only his coming unexpected that took me aback."

"He's a bad lot," said Anne, "and I've a good mind to fetch the policeman from Chase End and have him took up."

"Don't talk like a child, now," answered Mrs. Roland, walking away, whilst Anne, whose notions about the law were like those of old Susan, walked after her, saying, "I'd have him took up, if I had *my* way," and the butler was showing the visitor into the gallery.

Everard, who was sitting there, waiting for the arrival of Hubert Freville and running his eyes over the "Ledchester Courier," looked up at the sound of the opening door just as the butler pronounced these unexpected words: "The Marquis Moncalvo."

The bearer of this title, so unpopular among the old women of Chase End and its vicinity, was a tall, handsome man of about forty, with very dark and expressive eyes, black hair and moustaches, and a clear complexion of a light-olive colour. The hair and moustaches were blue-tinted, like a raven's wing, and as glossy, the latter giving a very marked expression to the mouth, because the rest of the face was shaved. What that expression did or might mean was not easy to determine, nor is this the time and place for examining the question. The prevalent expression of his eyes at that moment was melancholy. He was very well made. The shape of his head showed intellectual powers above the average. His voice was musical, his manner that of a high-bred gentleman—a being essentially the same wherever he is to be found, though the word in its full meaning does not appear to be translatable.

"If he had come at any other time than this," thought Everard, as he rose and welcomed his unwelcome guest without betraying the smallest sign of surprise.

"I found myself so near," said the Marquis, "that I thought I would come round by Freville Chase, on my way to the station, and renew the acquaintance made when you were a child. You cannot remember me; but I think that I can see in you some likeness to what I remember, though it is so long ago."

"I have a pretty good memory for faces," answered Everard, "and I can recognise you quite well, knowing that it is you. I don't know that I should, if I had met you without knowing who you were. But don't go away yet. It must not be said that you came all this way to make a

morning visit. It would be against the customs and traditions of Freville Chase for me to receive a friend and connection in that way.

"It is very kind of you. I ought to be going to Brighton, for I have not half recovered from a bad illness, and the doctors have told me to bathe in the sea there."

"You cannot possibly get to Brighton to-day."

"No : I meant to sleep at Ledchester."

"But I can't hear of that. Let me ring and have your luggage taken off the fly."

"You are really so hospitable, that I hardly know how to say no—though I ought to be at Brighton."

Everard rang the bell, and resigned himself to the inopportune visit. The Marquis was of opinion that the welcome was given on principle rather than from inclination ; but he had meant to be invited, had come out of his way for that purpose, and was not going to alter his intention for the sake of an idea. So he accepted the invitation, and said :—

"I must tell you how it was that I happened to be so near. I came to England for some sea-bathing in a bracing air after an attack of Roman fever, which had left me very weak. On my way to London I was talking to a stranger in the train, who, among other things, talked about architecture—he was an architect—and gave me so interesting a description of the English Cathedrals, that I determined to see as many of them as I could ; and as I remembered that Ledchester was not very far from here, I thought that I would begin with that, and take advantage of being so near, to see once more the old family place of the Frevilles, where my dearest sister died, and renew the acquaintance begun so sadly."

"It is fortunate for me that you met the architect," said Everard, adding within the recesses of his own mind, "I really should be glad to see you, *simpliciter*, but *per accidens* I wish you were somewhere else."

The Marquis noticed that he had said everything in the way of welcome except that he was glad to see him, and naturally mistaking the cause, went on to say :—

"I wanted to see you for another reason. I have heard—no matter how—that the death of your half-brother, my nephew, has been supposed to have occurred through want of care on my part when, as the guardian appointed by his

mother, after your lamented father's death, I took him with me to Italy, being compelled to go there without delay for some pressing affairs."

"I assure you," said Everard, "that I have never believed anything of the sort,"

"I hardly thought you would, and since I have seen you, I am quite sure that you have too much insight into character to believe it; but I thought it better to mention the subject, because there is quite enough in the facts of the case to put all kinds of suspicions into people's heads. I had been very extravagant and foolish, and my sister had inherited a considerable fortune from an uncle, which would be mine, failing children. The death of the dear little child put me into possession of that money, and I am not at all surprised that people who had no knowledge of me should have thought the circumstances very suspicious. They little knew the extraordinary affection there was between my dearest sister and myself, and how I cherished everything that belonged to her."

"Nobody ever doubted it, I hope," said Everard.

"I took an English maid-servant with me," said the Marquis, "to take charge of him, a woman born and bred in this neighbourhood, and recommended by your neighbour and guardian, I think or rather by his wife"——

"Lady Dytechley, was it not?"

"Yes; I remember the name, now you mention it. I engaged her, in preference to a foreigner, from motives of prudence, to make it evident that every possible care was taken. And that reminds me to ask you if she is living, and if so, whether I can hear anything about her; for I should like to know. She was a good girl, but weak in the head and subject to a monomania, especially after the death of my poor little nephew, of whom she was excessively fond. She was afterwards lady's-maid to an aunt of mine, and remained with her very happily till my aunt died about a year ago, when she came to England, though I offered her a place in my house with nothing to do. I feel of course a great interest in her, not only on account of my poor little nephew, but also because she was so long in my aunt's service, and I want to be sure that she is well off."

"Her Father lives at Chase End," said Everard; "and I think I heard that she came home last winter while I was

abroad. I don't know whether she is about here now, but I can easily find out. I will see about it now."

He left the room in search of Mrs. Roland, and meeting her on his way, said; "Do you know whether Charlotte Wilcox is with her family, or whether they know where she is?"

"I will inquire if her family know where she is gone," answered Mrs. Roland, with some hesitation. "But, Mr. Everard, what does *he* want to know for?"

"Why she lived sixteen years with his aunt, and when his aunt died, came to England; and he naturally feels interested to know about her."

"Well, but Mr. Everard, I don't know any harm of him, I am sure; but what I haven't liked is his hanging about at Lyneham, and then coming here as if he hadn't.

"But he never did so. Sir Richard met the man that Bolton took for him, and said he was a different man altogether—not the least like him. He told me so himself, for I asked the question."

"Well, Sir Richard must know anyhow," said Mrs. Roland to herself as she went her way. "I suppose Bolton thought there was no other foreigner but the Marquis Moncalvo."

Everard returned to the gallery and told the Marquis that he had not succeeded in obtaining the information he wanted, but would get it from Charlotte Wilcox's father in Chase End. He then asked him how he liked Ledchester Cathedral.

"Beautiful as a dream—'un rêve en pierre,' as a French book on England, that I read some years ago, says of the Houses of Parliament—which however did not give me that idea, though I admired them very much. It seems to me that they leave too little for the imagination to be like a dream. I thought them more like a great public work of a great nation."

"I think the man must have been dreaming who put the stones the wrong way up so as to let the weather in," said Everard.

"No one but an Englishman would have said that," said the Marquis. "I admire the open way in which they find fault with themselves. None but a great nation could afford to do it."

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"What is the use of deceiving oneself," said Everard, "when people from other countries have eyes to see, ears to hear, and brains to think with, and when one can't alter the fact by ignoring it? I can't go so far as to admire the habit of self-criticism, though I very much appreciate your appreciation of it. It strikes me as a very useful habit, but it seems too natural to be worthy of admiration."

"You are accustomed to it," said the Marquis; "but to me, as a foreigner"——

"Mr. Sherborne, Mr. De Beaufoy," said the old butler, opening the door and standing square to his front.

"I am so glad to see the old place again," said De Beaufoy. "How is my old friend Mrs. Roland? I can't go away without seeing her."

"She is very well," answered Everard, "and doesn't look a day older than when she used to keep me in order in the days of my ingenuous childhood. I believe that she holds herself responsible for my behaviour now."

"The conversation, which had been in Italian before the entrance of Sherborne and De Beaufoy, now turned into French, and finally into English, which the Marquis spoke grammatically, though with some effort, and preferred to speak it for the sake of practice. After a while he returned to the interrupted topic, and described his surprise at the beauty of Ledchester Cathedral.

"How little one knows," he said, "especially of things that one ought to know—places within one's reach, and with which one is in a manner connected. I could have told the measurement of the Pyramid of Cheops, and I had not the least idea of the grand Gothic architecture that is to be found in the cathedrals of England. I so much prefer Gothic architecture to our own."

"So do I," said Everard, "here, where it grew up in the ages of faith. It symbolises in stone the faith that produced it, and is in harmony with the atmosphere, temperature and features of the country. The idea of a basilica in England, however good of its kind, is to my mind not merely incongruous, but implies a forgetfulness of history: it implies that, having forgotten the old faith and traditions which we got from Rome, and which inspired those buildings, we have to begin anew, and borrow an architecture as unsuitable as it is untraditional. But I do love basilicas in Rome. They

harmonise with everything there—air, light, landscape, the history of the Church and of the world.”

“To require basilicas as a proof of orthodoxy,” said De Beaufoy, “which it appears that some excitable newspaper correspondents have occasionally implied, is like insisting on a man’s having a Roman nose to show that he is a good Catholic ; but I am as enthusiastic as any one about basilicas in their right places.”

“There was some function going on within the sanctuary,” said the Marquis. “I don’t know what it was.”

“Have the Dean and Chapter of Ledchester become Ritualists?” asked Everard, looking at De Beaufoy for information.

“No, no,” said De Beaufoy : “it was only a minor canon and the choristers working away out of the Book of Common Prayer.”

“What did you think of the function?” said Sherborne.

“That there was no proportion between it and the building.”

“A very well-known German authoress,” said De Beaufoy, “wrote some years ago, in a work which, for some reason or other, was not printed, that the cathedral service (in Westminster Abbey, I think) reminded her of a withered nut rattling in a shell too large for it.”

“What a difference there is,” said Sherborne, “between seeing those things before one has had the light of the one true faith, and after—especially when, in the former case, one believed the Establishment to represent that one true faith given by our Lord to the Apostles, as I did formerly. I have been in Ledchester Cathedral since, while service was going on, and found it, of course, *vox et præterea nihil* ; but I remember the time when the thing it represented was a subjective reality, like a dream or an optical delusion.

“And you were in perfectly good faith while you believed it,” said the Marquis—“for I am sure that you are too conscientious to have been otherwise—and you must know others no less so who still believe as you did.”

“Most certainly I do. God forbid that it should be otherwise!”

“And the Church of England has retained so much of the truth, that really the difference is much less than people who have not been in England would think.”

This liberal opinion was received with a triple murmur of dissent.

"Hang it," said De Beaufoy, "the *Depositum Fidei* was not left to the Church to be drawn upon at will, like a bank. The Catholic faith is indivisible, *as* faith, though we are obliged to divide it doctrinally; and he who denies one article only may indeed be near the Church in his heart, and soon to be a member of it in fact, but, till he is so, he is distinctly out of it. There is no boundary line between what our Lord founded and what men made up, out of what they chose to take from it. When a Protestant (as I was) comes into the Church, he doesn't step across the way: he makes an act of the will, and is taken an immense distance, like the man with the wishing carpet in the Arabian Nights."

"Certainly," said the Marquis. "I only meant that—that the Church of England is very different from Protestantism in other countries, for instance Germany and Switzerland, and what little there is of it in France."

"The difference is very great indeed, both in kind and degree," said Sherborne: but Protestantism in England shows premonitory symptoms of falling into the same condition before another half century at the least. The world is fast becoming tired of compromises"—

"And so am I!" said Hubert Freville, as the old butler opened the door and announced him. "The fly from the station broke down, or rather the horse, who was taken with the staggers, and I had to choose between carrying a port-manteau, a carpet bag, and a hat box, or coming on in a fish-cart. So I chose the fish-cart, and the smell was not refreshing."

He sent a rapid and penetrating glance into the eyes of the Marquis, saying to himself as he did so, "What is the fellow staring at *me* for?"

"This is Hubert Freville," said Everard. "But perhaps you have met him before."

"I have not had that pleasure," said the Marquis; "but the name of Hubert, and that indefinable likeness which is seen between members of a family, even when distantly related, reminded me of my poor nephew Hubert Freville, though he was only three years old when he died. That indefinable likeness—a very slight one it must be between a child and a man—together with the uncommon name of

Hubert, must have made me appear to have known him before."

"A family likeness," said Everard, "is a curiously persistent thing. You see it sometimes in people not nearly related, and find the type in an old family picture."

"And often," said Sherborne, "you are reminded of one face by another without seeing any traceable resemblance of feature."

"You see it," said De Beaufoy, "as you find your way in a fog, when you can't distinguish the line of country and yet know very well where you are."

"True," said the Marquis. "That is the kind of likeness I meant. It would scarcely have struck me anywhere else ; but when I heard the very name of my little nephew unexpectedly, here in this house where my sister died in giving birth to him, everything combined to make me notice it. I see a kind of family likeness now, but very slight. But really I must apologise for talking so much of myself. The truth is that the circumstances recalled very painful memories. My sister (the mother of that dear child) was the most affectionate and most true friend I ever had or shall have, and the wisest too. If I had always followed her advice I should have been a better and happier man. Some youthful extravagances of mine gave her much anxiety, the more so because my father and mother were both dead, and she wrote a most touching and beautiful letter to me on that subject after her arrival here. I never saw her again. And now that I have explained the cause of my spoiling the conversation by talking of myself, I hope that you will allow me to make the *amende* by returning to it. We were speaking of English cathedrals, were we not ?"

"The catch-word was 'compromises,' " said Hubert. "What were they ?"

"Well, I was getting into a long story," said Sherborne, looking at his watch, "and we must be going, for we have ten miles to ride, and the roads are full of loose stones."

"And I," said the Marquis, should be glad to go to my room, and write a rather important letter that I ought to have written two days ago."

"Leaving him to write his letter, Sherborne and De Beaufoy started on their way back to Hazely ; Everard and Hubert Freville strolled into the Chase.

"I don't care about that Marquis Moncalvo," said Hubert, standing still after a while, and poking his stick into the fern.

"Nor I," answered Everard. "But he is a gentleman; which is a characteristic not without its advantages for those with whom it comes in contact, whoever they may be."

"Unquestionably, when the thing is solid; but when the material is rotten, the vigour of the pattern is what a Low Church great aunt of mine used to call a snare and a delusion."

"But I don't think the material *is* rotten. He looks to me like a man who has lost opportunities, misapplied capabilities, wasted life—a man who has repressed his higher aspirations, but not killed them, a man who might say of himself, '*video meliora, proboque: deteriora sequor.*' I have a strong suspicion that Italian liberalism, with what belongs to it, has been the cause of all the mischief. What you don't like and I don't like in him comes from that, I think. I have been a good deal in Italy, and I know something of the sleepless watch that is kept over the young men by the Sect, in order to ruin their morals first, and then their faith. The first step is to corrupt their principals—that is the major premiss. The second, to put a particular temptation before them—that is the minor. The conclusion is total irreligion and utter ruin. It doesn't follow that all of them get into the secrets of the Sect. Many of them don't, wouldn't if they could, and couldn't if they would. They won't become bad enough, or haven't sufficient will and brains; but the poison has pervaded them in a smaller degree, like a blood poison in the body, and however slight the infection may be, it is very hard to get rid of. So long as the heart has a soft place in it there is hope; and the deep feeling he showed for his sister makes me feel sure that, whatever he may have been (which I can only guess at) he will turn out well in the end. To-morrow is Sunday, and we shall see something. Anyhow I don't mean to let him go from here, if I can help it, without seeing what he is made of."

"You are right—I believe you always are," said Hubert, "though we haven't had it out yet about mixed marriages and some other things. You are a fine fellow anyhow, in every way."

"I?" said Everard. "If you could only see me as I see myself you wouldn't think so."

"I have no doubt that is your opinion," said Hubert. "But we, all of us, think either too much or too little of ourselves. But here he is: his letter wasn't very long."

The Marquis joined them, and the conversation: the latter changed on his approach. And whilst he was talking agreeably on various subjects, Sherborne was talking to De Beaufoy about him.

Their ride, as a ride was not of the most pleasant sort, their horses not being suited for picking their way cleverly among loose flints in the month of August. The dear old British hack, with his mingled qualities of the pack-horse and the thorough-bred, light stepping and solid, free and steady, who picked up his feet just enough to clear obstacles, set them down flat, and went as straight to his front as the centre serjeant when a regiment is advancing in line, has become extinct because men have ceased to require him. To ride anywhere, except home from hunting, is now held to be slow, and also a waste of time, though the old British hack would have done the distance as quickly as the popular dog-cart; but nothing is said about the time spent in running up by railway to London continually for the purpose of hearing a new play and coming back again in a smoking carriage. Sherborne would have gladly had a good hack if he could, but being unable to find a tolerable substitute for the extinct animal above mentioned, was waiting for a chance of doing so; and thus it happened that he and De Beaufoy were mounted on two big hunters, who went very well across the country; but along the road, where in the summertime stones do mostly congregate, shuffled unpleasantly, rolling about on their shoulders and sticking their toes into the ground.

"I know a man who has got a hack to sell," said De Beaufoy, "a dark chestnut mare fifteen hands or a little over, as nice an animal of the kind as you could pick up. She steps well, her hind-leg action is equally good, and she sets her feet down flat."

"Which is more than these horses are doing," said Sherborne. "Whose is she?"

"I saw her in Lyneham on Wednesday, when you were on the bench. The ostler at the White Hart can tell you who the owner is; for he called my attention to her, and said the man was a farmer somewhere between there and

Exborne. What do you think of the mysterious Marquis, the bugbear of the old women at Chase End and thereabouts?"

"That requires consideration," said Sherborne. "He is not so easy to understand. I should say that the web of his life is, or has been, of a '*mingled yarn*.'"

"Touching which *mixture of good and ill together*," said De Beaufoy, "Shakespeare goes on to say that '*our virtues would be proud if our vices whipped them out*.' I fancy that the Marquis's virtues must have had a good deal of whipping. Perhaps it made them promise not to show themselves again."

"If they did," said Sherborne, "they have not kept their promise."

"You are right: there is good in him, I am certain. But there is something about him that looks as if the good were kept under in spite of him. There is strength in the shape of his mouth, and a certain weakness too, as if the weaker part of his character had to knock under before some external influence, and the stronger were called in to collar the weaker and make it do what it was told."

"Exactly. I am afraid the sect has got hold of him; and if so, it is a bad business. It clings to its victims like the '*Old Man of the sea*.'"

"I know it does. And you can't shake it off by making it drunk, as Sindbad did; and if you could, it would only be more sharp-witted than before, like a Scotchman."

"Yes; and if he wanted to get out of that, he would have to get out of the way, very much indeed out of the way; but I have a strong opinion that he is not far in it, if he is at all. I don't think he would suit their book: he would have to be either very much worse than he is, or more pliable. I feel sure that he has got little more than the religion and morals of the thing, and perhaps I am mistaken in thinking he has gone so far as that. He is a fine-looking man, a refined and polished gentleman, but he doesn't show well by the side of Everard Freville."

"No, but he is a very distinguished-looking man for all that; and I never met a man with finer or more attractive manners, except of course Everard Freville, who is altogether exceptional. In him the remarkable fine manners are an integral part of the man: in the Marquis they rather suggest

the idea of class. But the man and his position should seem one and indivisible, and in Everard they are so. There is another thing too ; and it must be uncommonly striking to make *me* notice it ; for as I don't write novels or poetry, I don't much care about distinguishing one man from another, except by what is inside his head. But the expression of Everard Freville's countenance, especially his smile, is something extraordinarily beautiful : it lets you into the whole character of the man, the gentleman, and the Christian. I never took notice before how a man looks at you, and I am not likely to do so again ; but I couldn't help noticing his expression to-day."

And let this much of the equestrian dialogue suffice.

While Sherborne and De Beaufoy were exchanging ideas about the Marquis Moncalvo, Anne the housemaid was stating, whenever an opportunity offered, her unalterable conviction that the latter "ought to be took up ;" and as the news of his arrival had passed, through the medium of the grocer's boy, into the village of Chase End, the Marquis had a fair chance of waking up next morning and finding himself famous in that locality.

But it seemed that mysterious appearances were prevalent at this time. A little before seven o'clock the waiter at the White Hart, in the ancient market town of Lyneham, walked up to the landlady in a gradual and communicative manner, his eyes expanded, his bearing confidential, and whispered in her ear :—

"She's come again—that foreign woman."

The landlady's colour rose a little, and the body of her dress became rather tight, but she replied without any apparent disturbance of mind :

"Very well. Show her into Number One sitting-room."

"There's no end of them foreigners," thought the waiter, as he left the bar. "There was that chap here on Wednesday, as hordered a lot of rubbidge for his dinner, and must have know'd all the while he couldn't get it in a respectable house ; and then there's another of them, as came here for a fly to-day, when they was short of flies at the station, and went off to Squire Freville's—but *he* were a gentleman, and no mistake—not a bit like the other. Now where is she got to ?"

The foreign visitor was standing just within the house-

door—a tall, dark woman, with what the waiter described as a very middling countenance. Apparently she was of no definite age. Her features were regular, and might have been handsome once, but were now hard and coarse, perhaps owing to the same cause that produced the middling countenance.

"This way, ma'am, please," said the waiter, trying to look civil, but eyeing her suspiciously.

She followed him to Number One sitting room, where the landlady was ready, though not willing, to receive her. As soon as the door was shut, which action was performed by the waiter in a delicate and imperceptible way, so that both the women looked round to see whether he was within hearing or not, the mistress of the White Hart said bluntly :—

"What are you here for again? Can't you get an honest living by honest labour, as I do, without going cadging about, spunging on other people. I should be ashamed of living so."

The visitor's black eyes flashed ominously, as she uttered the word of stormy import, "Pazienza!"

"Oh! yes," said the landlady; "I have heard that before in your country, and I know it always means they're in a rage."

"Do not speak so," said the Italian; and the vibrations of her voice made the landlady look nervously towards the door, remembering how slow the process of shutting it had been.

"Don't talk so loud," she said. "Do you want everybody to hear? It is *your* business to think of *that* anyhow."

"I cannot speak your language like you," answered the Italian woman. "If I could, you would never say so much, I think. But I can say this:—Give me money, for I want it."

"Give you money? Haven't I given you money—given you money till I have barely enough to go on with in business and keep myself? You had as good a chance as I had, without the risks of keeping an inn. You had the same money given you as I had—just the same. If you have chosen to waste it, why am I to ruin myself, to set you on your legs over and over again, I should like to know?"

"Che volete? Sono miserie umane. I have been

unfortunate, and you have been prosperous, and you are bound to help me—you know why."

"Unfortunate! you have been idle and wasteful, and"—

"Listen to me! If you do not give me money to-day, I will tell of you."

"And of yourself at the same time. You can't do one without the other."

"And what do I care for that? Do not try to make me afraid. I am not afraid of you, nor of any woman, nor man neither, and I mean what I tell you. I must have twenty pounds."

"Twenty fiddlesticks!"

"I do not know what fiddlesticks are, but I must have the pounds."

"You won't, I can tell you. Why, in the first place, I haven't got them just now. Do you suppose I could give you fifty pounds last January, and thirty the Michaelmas before, besides all the rest you have bothered me out of, and have money now to give you, with all the expenses of this place, and not half the custom there used to be? Why in the world don't you go to *him* for it? It's his business, not mine. What right have you to come to me for money any more than I have to ask you for it, eh?"

"I cannot find him: he is travelling in some country. If you can tell me where he is"——

"Well, I thought I saw him here a few days ago. I was not quite sure about it at the moment, but"——

"Then why send me to run after him, and to make me look like a fool before him? Non sono una bestia, sai. Give me the money, and I will go for my affairs. If not—well! Hm! ha! Che volete? I shall know what thing I ought to do, and I shall do it—I promise it to you."

"Well, there now, I *am* sure that he's the man. If you had listened, I was going to have told you that I *was* sure of it afterwards. Is it so very wonderful that I didn't make him out at first? Don't people grow older? I am sure *you* have. I shouldn't have known you, that I shouldn't, if I hadn't seen you since I saw *him* last—and I wish to goodness I hadn't—for you have grown to look *so* old, you have, and"——

"Miseries have made"——

"Miseries! rubbish!"

"You have grown old without them—so old—oh! and as fat as a great old pig."

"Now don't let us have any words. I tell you he's the man, and the waiter knows where he went to."

She went forth and questioned that functionary, who replied, "Well'm, he told me he were going to Ledchester for the meeting at Monksgallows, and give me to understand he meant to stay about there a bit."

"He wasn't the same party that came here to-day for a fly when I was out, was it?" said she.

"Lord bless you! no. That were a different man altogether. He's a real gentleman, a lot younger, and isn't anyways like that chap. He had his man with him, and he's gone to stay with Squire Freville."

"I thought so," said the landlady, returning quickly to Number One sitting-room. "He is at Ledchester. You will find him at the George Hotel, or, if not, at the Crown."

"Thank you," answered the woman of the middling countenance; "but I want some money. I must have ten pounds."

"I tell you I can't—you have run me dry."

"Then I will go and tell"——

"Don't be a fool. Can't you understand plain English? If my poor husband were alive, you wouldn't dare to come bothering me so. He would have taken the law of you long ago."

"Did the poor husband know?"

"Don't be impertinent now. There's a train at 7-35, and the railway bus will call here for it directly."

"Yes, but give me ten pounds or I will tell"——

The landlady's dress became exceedingly tight.

"Now, if I give it you this time," she said, "will you promise not to come after me any more?"

"I will not, if I can find him," answered the mysterious visitor. The landlady left the room, and presently reappeared with a ten pound note.

"There it is," said she. "Now remember your promise—don't you come here again."

"Not if I can find *him*," said her unpleasant friend, pocketing the money and offering her hand.

The landlady stood erect, and advancing her right arm

about ten inches from the tightened body of her dress, put two fingers into the outstretched palm before her.

Five minutes afterwards the omnibus relieved her of her troublesome visitor, and she retired to the bar, ruffled indeed as to her feelings at being likened to a "great old pig," but satisfied on the whole with the result of the interview.

"He's the man; and that beast of a woman will find him there, if he's not gone," thought she as she sat down, pen in hand, to her accounts. "And if he *is* gone, why he'd have letters to be forwarded somewhere—of course, and she'll find him out in that way. It was worth a ten pound note to do *that*, though I haven't another to bless myself with just now."

"They're a queer lot, them foreigners, all except him as is gone to Freville Chase," said the waiter to the ostler, as the omnibus rolled away, bearing the Italian and her black mail to the station. "Here's Bolton the carrier. No, we haven't got nothing for Chase End. But I say, Bolton, you was wrong about that foreigneering chap last Toosday. *He* wasn't the Marquis as came here to-day and took a fly to go to your Squire's."

"I never said he were," replied Bolton. "I says, says I, to old Betty Tredgett, There's a foreigner come to the White Hart at Lyneham, they tell me. 'You haven't seen him? says she.' I cant say, says I, which I never see this one, nor t'other neither. 'You may depend on it, that it is, says she.' And then another woman come up and said, 'In course it's him. Who else would come from foreign parts a-hanging about here?' And they set it about, as if they know'd it were him, and said as I had told them so. That's how it were. I never know'd nothing about neither on 'em, nor never see neither on 'em."

*Exemplo Libyce magnas it Fama per urbes ;
Fama malum, quo non aliud velocius ullum,*

thought the waiter in the following free translation :—"I see. The women got a-talking all over the place. Well ! their tongues is queer things to deal with, *I* know."

"There's no bounds to 'em when they gets a-talking," said Bolton, as he started on his way back to Chase End.

About this time the Marquis was sitting down to dinner

at Freville Chase, ignorant of his local celebrity, and old Susan, standing on the doorway of the house at the Four Ways, was trying to persuade Muggles of the county police that the mysterious disappearance of Jane Davis could be attributed to nothing else but his neglect of duty in not taking up the itinerant foreigner.

CHAPTER VIII.



AT dinner the Marquis talked well on a variety of subjects, but his remarks did not enable his host to discover what he was made of. On Sunday, after Mass, Everard said in confidence to himself, Either his recollection was an example to most of us, myself very much included, or his mind was on something else; but there was something too stiff about it for recollection: *ergo*—no, that is unfair, and there are just as good grounds for putting it in this way:—He was either recollected or thinking of something else: but he was not thinking of something else, for he didn't look about: therefore he was recollected. That is more charitable, but it will not do, for the mind can be off when the eyes are steady. Either it was recollection, or it was the effort of a man who has neglected his religious duties and is not at home with them. It was too stiff for recollection: therefore—and the rest. And that is what it is. He is in the Church, but not of it. Poor fellow! who can tell what bad chances he may have had? Perhaps this quiet old place, with no *liberali* near, may be of use to him. This may be the turning-point of his life. I will ask him to stay here some time."

'Hubert also made confidential remarks to himself about the Marquis, but they were of a somewhat abusive character. Father Merivale was too busy with his Sunday's duties—two baptisms, a wedding, a funeral, and a sick call three miles off, to have any opinion about him at all, except that he was a cultivated and well-informed man. The four met

at dinner again, with the same result as on Saturday. The Marquis was as agreeable as ever, but what he was made of did not appear.

"I'll be hanged if I think he's made of anything except outside," said Hubert, when he and Everard were standing in the hall, and the priest putting on his hat to go home.

"Yes, he is," said Everard. "You don't doubt that there are works in a watch you see going, though you couldn't say what they are. You have not seen the works yet ; but there is something more than the case, you may rely upon it."

"It seems to me," said Father Merivale, "that you are both looking too deep, deeper than he goes. He is a clever, cultivated man, not devout, and not irreligious. I have not seen so much of him as you have, and I may be mistaken ; but I can see no signs of anything more at present."

Everard, being engaged to meet Sir Richard and the two lawyers on Monday about the settlements, and not liking to leave his two ill-assorted guests for an indefinite time, had proposed to take them with him, and sent a note to that effect. Lady Dytchley had replied that she should be delighted to see them at luncheon, and they prepared to start accordingly for Netherwood on Monday morning. As the Marquis preferred riding, and there were only three horses in the stables, one of them being the same that had backed on the fly at Bramscote, making the fly back on the curate and the curate knock a man's lighted pipe out of his mouth, Everard chose the harness horse for himself, and left the two hunters for his guests. One of them was quiet, the other decidedly not.

"You had better put me on that one," said Hubert. "Of course he can't ride."

"I don't know that at all ; I daresay he can," said Everard ; "but he will find the other horse pleasanter. So you had better ride Thunderbolt. You wouldn't like the chestnut : he goes in harness and has no fore-legs to speak of. I will ride him."

As the business was to be done before luncheon, the three set off for Netherwood at half-past eleven o'clock, just as the doctor was feeling Lady Dytchley's pulse and saying, that she was much better, but must be very careful to avoid all worry.

She was in a state of conditional convalescence. The Bible, the bottle of sal-volatile, and the blotting book were still on the sofa; but she moved about the house at intervals, her first appearance downstairs being whispered about beforehand, and the doctors injunctions promulgated.

Her first appearance took place about half-past twelve o'clock on that Monday morning. She said that she felt very unequal to the exertion, but, as Everard had wished to bring his two friends with him, she would make the effort.

Sir Richard was then conversing pleasantly with the two lawyers, and congratulating himself on the approaching event which had brought them to the house.

"They can't bother me any more about Ida after that," thought he. "What a blessing it will be, not to have any more of it! not to be pestered and blown up, and talked at, and abused, and made out to be wrong, whatever one does, and set upon all round. As for Elfrida, I hope she will marry a Catholic some day, I am sure; and if I can help her to do it, without having the place turned upside down, why, there it will be—all right—and so it will be. But what a comfort it is that she doesn't make a bother now, to bring about such a row as there was the other night coming home from Bramscote. I have never forgiven that lout of a fellow for getting on the rumble, when I told him he might smoke till he was black in the face in the old billiard room. Well, it will be all right in three weeks; and if Ida will only keep quiet between this and then! But I see that she will; so it is all right—all right. I never liked the looks of a lawyer's parchments before. I feel so jolly, that if these two fellows were not here"——

What he would have done in that case did not appear, for at that moment the butler came in and said:—"Please, Sir Richard, My lady wishes to speak to you in the library."

Sir Richard was a man whose habits were emphatically respectable, and therefore unseemly words were as great an abomination to his taste as (let us hope) they were to his principles. He had never been induced to utter an oath, and only twice to think one. The first occasion was during the dinner-party at Bramscote: the second, and, as far as is yet known, the last, was at this moment, on being told that Lady Dytchley wanted to speak to him.

"D—n it! The devil take this business!" said he to him-

self in mute confidence. "What can be up now? It's all arranged, and Ida is keeping quiet about the other matter. Surely"—

"Don't let us detain you," said one of the lawyers. "We have done all that is to be done till Mr. Freville comes."

"You can find work enough when nobody wishes it," thought Sir Richard, as he rose with a rueful countenance to leave the room; "and now, when you might keep me here free from bother, you must needs tell me right out, while the man is in the room, that I am not wanted here!"

He walked slowly, trying to collect his thoughts, and form a general plan of defence against all personal annoyances; but at last the moment arrived when the library door was in front of his nose. He opened it delicately and peeped in.

"There is that sofa again," thought he, "or at least another of them. I see how it is. I have a great mind to go back again, and pretend I have something to tell the lawyers."

"Come in," said a well known voice from within. "There is no one here."

"I only wish there were," he thought. But there was no help for it, and in he went.

Lady Dytchley left the sofa and advanced in a determined manner, smiling as a careful mother smiles on her child when it is doubtful whether he will be good or not, and her countenance gives a hint of summary measures.

"Well, my dear, how are you? You look ever so much better," said Sir Richard, approaching her in an elastic and cheerful manner.

"I am better, he tells me," said she, leaning against the sofa, "but liable to a return of the attack in a worse form, if I am at all agitated. It is very provoking, particularly at this time when, after all that has happened, it was most desirable not to put anything off: but he says (and so did Dr. Chloradyne from Ledchester, who came with him just now, only you were engaged) that I must go abroad immediately."

"I knew there was something," thought Sir Richard. I wish Dr. Chloradyne had given her a sleeping draught instead of sending her abroad. What does he know about abroad?"

"So I am to start on Thursday and take Ida with me."

"Well, but—I say, you know, it's uncommonly awkward," said Sir Richard. "We always promised that it should be directly he came of age, and he was five and twenty yesterday, the 6th. Couldn't you manage to put it off a little? The weather will be cooler for travelling."

"If you have any regard whatever for my health, you will not propose that again," was the inauspicious reply.

"But, my dear, you see"—

"And what would be the use of it? It would only put off the marriage later still."

"Why, I thought, you see, as everything is ready, we might have it a little sooner."

"If you wish to kill me, you will talk in that way and go on pressing me to consent to having it offhand in that disgraceful way, as if we were so delighted with it and it was such a very great honour that we couldn't wait like everybody else, but must hurry and push it on and make fools of ourselves, just because Everard has no feeling for me and never cared what happened to me—he has shown it in a thousand ways. I will not consent to it. Do as you like. Take it all into your own hands, and order the trousseau. *Do go and order it—you ought to be ashamed of yourself.*"

The reproach was uttered in a tone of such profound conviction that, for an instant, Sir Richard almost felt himself guilty of meddling in the mysteries of dressmaking and its accessory arts; but, being sure, on reflection, that he had not so offended, he was emboldened to say, "Hasn't the trousseau been ordered yet? How would there have been time to get it all done by the 20th of August, if things had not been, you know?"—

"But it isn't wanted for the 20th of August—how foolishly you talk!" said she, colouring up and looking down.

"But it *was* to be then, my dear, you know; and I was thinking that, in that case, you had driven it off rather."

"Do you suppose, now, that I don't know better than you do how long it takes to get a trousseau ready? But you must think you know better, on purpose to insinuate that I wasn't obliged to put it off, when I had planned everything."—

"I don't insinuate that at all," said Sir Richard.

She coloured more violently than before. Sir Richard was

in momentary danger of hearing something greatly to his disadvantage, and would without doubt have heard it, had not his countenance proved his entire innocence of intention or ability to make grim fun out of the equivocal planning ; but he had seen enough to make him desire peace at any price, not considering that peace patched up on unsound principles is neither permanent nor successful.

"My dear," he said, "I think we had better talk it over quietly, you know. We can arrange it all, I have no doubt : it *is* rather awkward, you see, if it's to be long. How long do you want to put it off for ?"

"Six months. The doctors both say that I am to stay that time ; and I am not going to kill myself and leave Elfrida without a mother, for the sake of pleasing Edward Freville."

"Of course not : but, you see, what am *I* to do ? Don't you see, Everard will be here presently, and upon my word, you know, you *must* see the awkwardness of my position, especially as having been his guardian, which threw them so much together, and"——

"And he took advantage of it to set her against all I had taught her, and make her a hypocrite, wanting to turn because she is to marry him."

"Come, now, really," said Sir Richard, "you must remember that she was baptized a Catholic, and brought up so till she was seven years old, when you, you know—I am not saying you were not quite right in your own mind about it, and in fact my neglect brought it so—but you see there it was."

"Yes, there it was indeed—all your fault and neglect, and no example at all, but enough to make infidels of the poor dear children, if they had been left to you. And then you encourage Everard to undo all that, and persuade her to turn, merely because he is one of them. Now do leave me, or I shall not be able to receive the people at luncheon."

"Yes, but how about Everard, and this putting off. *I* won't tell him, I really can't."

"And who wants you to do so ? I am not afraid of telling him. Is it such a terrible grievance to wait six months for what he pretends to value so much ? I should think Ida was worth waiting six months for. I suppose you will be at home for luncheon. It would be so rude to leave those two."——

"Why you see, I really have to go some way off about

"Never mind. I don't want to see you standing there inventing excuses. If you are afraid, why run away. You had better be quick, for here they are riding up to the door."

Sir Richard looked through the window and turned in the opposite direction. It could not be said, in strict propriety of language, that he ran away, but he certainly walked fast until he found himself on the outside of a door at the other end of the room. He said, before shutting it, "Then you must tell these two lawyers that I was obliged to go."

"Yes, yes. Make haste, or you will be caught," answered Lady Dytechley, accompanying the words with that short laugh which he had heard before to his disadvantage.

"I can't help it," said he. "If I had to live my life over again, it would be all very well; but now—what can I do? It has all shaped itself into this mess, and there it is. It will all come right."

He made his way by a back staircase to his dressing-room, walked up and down for awhile, and sat down to consider the exigencies of the case.

"I must be off," said his inner consciousness. "I am sorry to seem to desert Everard in his troubles; but I can do him no good, and should make myself look like a fool. It will all come right, all come right. I wonder what old Chloradyne really *did* say—and the other doctor too. There's a way of making out things from what a doctor says, that isn't just what he said. I can't see much the matter with her, I can't indeed. Well, I must go somewhere, and without any luncheon, too, just as it's all ready at home. Where the deuce am I to get some luncheon? Father Johnson is away; and it's too near, into the bargain. I am uncommonly hungry for I breakfasted at eight o'clock, to get back for those two lawyers (I wish they had never come), and now it's close upon half-past one, and I have to ride off, and keep out all the afternoon, without the chance of a bit of bread and cheese. A pretty thing it is to be starved in one's own house with the smell of the luncheon in one's nose. What am I to do? In the country there are no clubs, and in my own neighbourhood I can't go to a public-house. If I call anywhere I shall be too late, even if they are at home;

and it would look so odd to go to a farmhouse and say I could get nothing to eat. I don't know what to do. Upon my word it's the hardest case that ever was. It's all nonsense to say that going abroad is necessary for her health, and I don't believe the doctors ever said so. They only saw it was wanted, and thought it would do no harm. I have a great mind to do something. By Jove, I will, too ! I will go and say plainly that I won't have the marriage put off, but put on, and settle the business and get my luncheon."

It is needless to say that he did nothing of the kind. Hunger could suggest the idea, but not enforce its execution. Starving in the midst of plenty he rode forth, grumbling in his heart while the luncheon bell sounded in his ears.

To be perfectly just, we must admit that the project was easier to imagine than to carry out. Not only would he have to encounter another tantrum of an aggravated kind, but he must take upon himself an indefinite responsibility in opposition to two doctors ; for though he felt morally certain that their statements had undergone a considerable change in passing through the imagination, how was he to explain himself to that effect in a delicate manner, and how was he to know that her interpretation of what they had said was not sufficiently true to render an explosion of feelings more or less dangerous? Have not large women nerves and livers and physical hearts like other people? He might indeed have questioned the two doctors and acted accordingly, for their answers would have satisfied anyone that the postponement of the marriage was not necessary ; but having gone so far as to tell himself that he had a great mind to do something, he felt at liberty to reward the vigorous intention by doing nothing. Where he went and what he did during the hours of his voluntary exile and involuntary abstinence is not recorded ; but his sudden departure astonished the two lawyers.

It had been arranged, with the directive concurrence of Lady Dythchley, that Everard should see them after luncheon ; and the arrangement appeared good to every one concerned, especially to herself. She had now to communicate the change of plans, a duty requiring some skill and not a little self-confidence. The information was conveyed in the simplest and most natural manner, as follows :

"We had better not wait for Sir Richard," said she, when

the luncheon was announced ; " for I know he had to go out quite unexpectedly, and he may be detained some time. I *do* hope and trust it will not put out all your arrangements much. It is excessively provoking, and he was immensely annoyed at it ; but he really couldn't help it."

Having thus made known as much as she meant her hearers to understand at present, Lady Dytchley of Netherwood waited for a sympathetic reply, feeling much comfort in the assurance that she had told nothing but the truth and kept her husband's dignity intact. The two lawyers had recovered from their natural astonishment before she had concluded her address, and knowing well

*The law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,*

only thought that Sir Richard was a great fool to waste money in bringing them down to Netherwood for no purpose. One of them said, that as their train would not start till half-past four, she need not feel uneasy, and the subject dropped.

It was a pleasant luncheon party, and well composed. Lady Dytchley took the greatest pains to be agreeable, and succeeded. The Marquis Moncalvo kept up a brilliant and varied conversation with her and the two lawyers. Hubert Freville found an object of new and attractive interest in Elfrida. Everard, though obliged to join in the general conversation, which Hubert declined to do, found himself next to Ida and had no suspicion of Sir Richard's flight. They sat there till a quarter to three, when Lady Dytchley rose and, ringing the bell, proposed that the Marquis, as he was fond of Gothic architecture, should be taken to see the parish church, which she affirmed (on what authority is not known) to have been built before the Norman Conquest.

" It can't be so old as that," said one of the lawyers to Everard.

" The arches are Early English, the rest of the nave Perpendicular, and the chancel Debased Gothic of the seventeenth century," answered Everard in a very low voice, moving away lest he should be called upon for any further information within earshot of Lady Dytchley. When the butler came to answer the bell, she asked whether Sir

Richard had returned, and, after listening with much gravity to the reply, said :—

"It is too, too provoking; but he can't be long. Suppose you all go to the church; it is very near. You can be back in less than half an hour, and then you will have plenty of time for everything. Elfrida, you go with them. Ida and Everard must be ready here to see your father when he comes in."

As soon as the archiological party had set out, she said, "Ida, my dear, I wish you would just finish that letter; it really ought to go to-day, and it will only take a few minutes."

Ida, who knew that it would take a great many, went upstairs unwillingly, as may he supposed, but without feeling any suspicion of what was to befall her. Lady Dythchley stood for a while at the foot of the staircase, as if she were intending to follow, then turning abruptly towards Everard, pointed to the library and said, "I want to speak to you in there."

She opened the door, shut it with a nervous push, and after walking a few paces up the room, stopped suddenly. Everard looked at her and listened.

"So you see he has not come back," said she.

"I have not seen him yet," answered Everard.

"Do you mean to insinuate that he is keeping out of the way, that you may not see him?"

"Certainly not. I meant that he might have returned within the last minute or two, but I have not seen him."

"It's all of a piece with everything that—but it's no matter. Who says he mightn't have returned within the last minute or two? and who says you have seen him? You have no right to hint in that way, when he has been so kind and so anxious and so very much more than a father about it all."

"But what have I ever done to make you suppose that I meant anything more than I said? I never hinted in my life. So far from implying that Sir Richard intended to be away I felt so sure of his returning in good time, that I expected every moment to see him, and naturally answered, 'I have not seen him yet.'"

"What is the use of telling me all that? Do you suppose I thought you meant to *show* you didn't care about us?"

"You mistake me. I didn't speak of showing: I spoke

of meaning. I tried to show what I meant. I am very sorry if I did not express myself with sufficient clearness, but you have known me long enough to take my word for the fact."

"And pray have I ever said you did not? I really have neither time nor health to go on in this way, listening to all this casuistry and twisting of one's words. Don't I know how people can say one thing and mean another?"—

"But I said that I did not mean what you thought I meant."

"I don't care what you said. It's too much, and more than I can bear, or ought to bear. I have borne a great, great deal too much, with all this going on, day after day, week after week, month after month, and Ida made to go after a nasty snuffy old priest to have all I taught her made wrong, and all through you. And now, when I have been so very ill, so ill that the doctor said it was very, very dangerous for me to be worried, and says that I *must* go abroad immediately for six months"—

The remainder of the sentence fell upon ears that heard not. Everard had listened with unshaken calmness to the torrent of contradictory accusations by which she had brought herself up to the required point; but when he was made aware that, by the doctor's orders, real or imaginary, she was going abroad for six months, the cause of Sir Richard's absence flashed across him in an instant, and the meaning of her violence. He saw at once that she meant to postpone the marriage, that Sir Richard had gone away to avoid seeing him, that she had worked herself up into a rage for the purpose of covering the confusion she evidently felt in making the disclosure. Circumstanced as he was, what could he do, if she persisted in her resolution? What would be the consequence if she did, and what hope was there that she would not? He was simply overwhelmed at the prospect before him; for if she could put off the marriage, without having any reason for doing so, except her own will backed by her own views of a doctor's opinion, what guarantee had he that she would not invent some other excuse at the end of the six months, place Ida in the most difficult position, and remain longer abroad to make the dilemma worse?

"Well! and have you nothing to say about it?" said Lady Dytechley, clutching at her dress and twisting her fingers round one of the bows till it came off. "I should have

thought you would have cared more about her, or at least pretended you did, than to stand there looking as if nothing had happened, when you must see that your marriage *must* be put off for six months. Six months—do you understand now? Six months—the doctor *will* have it so, and I am not going to kill myself and leave dear Elfrida, who never, never gave me any trouble, without a mother, just for you to get round her and undo all I taught, as you have done with Ida. Do you hear, now, what I say? I don't believe you care a bit about it except for her fortune. And that was why it was all arranged before you were born, arranged by the priests—now don't tell me it wasn't, for I know it was, as they always do—arranged by *your* family and the priests, to keep up Freville Chase, bringing all this misery upon me, to see my poor dear child thrown away in this manner. Can't you speak?"

"I was going to do so," answered Everard, with the resolute calmness of an exceptionally strong-willed man, who would not by any means whatsoever, be made to forget that Lady Dytechley was a woman. The natural answer would have been, "I was trying to do so;" but he was a man and a gentleman, and therefore he said, "I was going to do so."

"Were you?" she said, raising her voice accidentally or otherwise, and looking suddenly towards him, but avoiding his eyes.

He answered, "Yes, I was going to answer what you have said, so far as I understand it."

"It's enough to provoke one of your own saints, that you worship and think more of than you do of God and the ten commandments and the Bible and the good men who gave you the Bible, when your wicked priests had chained it up and made it mean all sorts of false things, and stick images into niches, to make the poor ignorant people believe they can hear you, as if the Bible didn't say, 'They have eyes and see not, ears and hear not.' But go on, go on—*do* go on."

"I hardly know what it is that you want me to answer," said Everard; "for I seem to be accused of so many things, and one thing leads on to another before I can answer it, so that I don't know where to begin. At any rate I am not accountable for what happened before I was born."

"And did I say you were?"

"I understood you to say so."

"It's a wicked, wicked story, and just like you. I said they had done all that (the priests and the rest) and that you had done the same, and don't care about Ida, except for her fortune, and"—

"Lady Dytchley, you must hear me now," said Everard, in a penetrating voice that made her turn away and stamp on the ground. "No one knows better than myself what money would do for Freville Chase, which I love more than anything in this world except Ida. Her fortune would do all, and more than all, that I wish to do for the benefit of others, not for myself, and would enable me to fulfil many a project that I have cherished from my boyhood. But I would willingly give up everything, let Freville Chase to a retired tinker, and live in one of my own cottages, growing potatoes, and shooting rabbits occasionally when the tinker invited me, if I had no other means of marrying Ida. I should regret what I had to do, because I love the old place, and still more because I should be of less use, but I should have no hesitation whatever about it; for, apart from my own feelings, which you may judge by what I have said and what I am prepared to do, I know that I should be right in acting so. We were promised to each other, we have grown up for each other, we are made for each other. I am ready to die for her, but I will not give her up for any earthly consideration or any earthly power. Have I made myself clearly understood?"

"What did I ever say about your marrying her with nothing?—and how could you have to do all those ridiculous things if you did, unless you have been wasting your money, as I daresay you have, giving it to the priests, who know of course, exactly what Ida will have, and spending it in all sorts of ways that I don't know of?—now don't tell me you haven't, for I never said you had. It's abominable of you to say such insulting things, as if we were capable of letting her marry you like a beggar, when she is to be so very well off, as *you* know better than anybody. You think you can get your way by saying all that, and playing the disinterested, and insulting me by hinting that I want to deprive my own child of what she is to have, and that you can make me go against the doctors and kill myself, to save you the trouble of waiting six months. You think it's all safe; and that you can make me do as you like

by threatening to let your place and put Ida in a cottage : but how do you know that it is all safe ? I tell you it's not. It's in our power ; and you will see that it is, if you try to marry her without my consent. And if you say much I will put it off for two years, as I have a great mind to do now for your daring to say that I wanted to deprive Ida of anything."

"I seem unable to make myself understood," said Everard. "You told me that I only cared for Ida's fortune, which, on reflection, you will, I am sure, regret to have said, and I simply answered a charge as odious and unfounded as could have been made. You must know perfectly well that the necessity I spoke of would not exist, even if Ida had happened to have had no fortune at all, and that I supposed it merely to show, in the strongest manner I could think of, the incorrectness of the charge you inadvertently brought against me. I have never done anything to warrant the opinions you have expressed of me in reference to Ida and in reference to yourself. You know as well as I do that I love Ida for herself, and not for her fortune : you know that I have always shown the most marked respect and consideration for you. As for the few words that I have said to Ida from time to time about religion, you must know that she was baptized and, till she was seven years old, brought up a Catholic, that the engagement was made by my father, and afterwards confirmed by myself on the understanding that she would be a Catholic, that you spoke over and over again of her being a Catholic after her marriage, and that you never said anything explicitly to me about not mentioning the subject to her in the meantime till last Tuesday. In what respect, then, have I offended in any way as regards yourself ? Surely when a man has already waited some time, as I have been obliged to do by not coming of age till five and twenty, it is not very wonderful that he should feel being put off for six months at the moment of signing the settlements."

"So you have found that out at last, and begun to see that it *did* look odd to be talking about all kinds of things, when you might have been expected to have shown some feeling about Ida. What has last Tuesday to do with all the worship of images, and setting up the Pope above God, doing away with the Bible, and buying indulgences to do what you like, and getting absolution by telling what you

please behind a curtain—which you have been trying to teach poor Ida ?”

“ If you really think that I have tried to make her believe such things as you have named, I am unable to understand how you can allow me to enter your house ; but you cannot and do not think so. Just consider what it implies. If you believe that the Catholic Church teaches these abominations, you must believe that your own husband is guilty of them by belonging to it.”

“ It implies nothing of the sort. You know very well he doesn’t follow all the Ultramontane things that were brought in by the Papal Aggression.”

“ Anyhow he believes in the supremacy of the Pope, which, if it means that the Pope is above God, is nothing less than the grossest idolatry ; and he goes to confession, which, if it means getting absolution for telling what one pleases, is hypocrisy of the worst kind. No assurance whatever could persuade me that you could have found it in your conscience to marry a man whom you believed to be an habitual idolater and hypocrite.”

Lady Dytchley’s face turned very red and then very white. She bit her lips in angry meditation for a few moments, changed the position of some books that lay on the table, crumpling the Supplement of the “ Times,” and upsetting a box of postage stamps. Clearly some kind of struggle was going on within. The fact was that she felt herself beaten on every point. She had neither irritated him by her rudeness, frightened him by her threats, nor confused him by her irrelevant interruptions and contradictory charges. He had shown her to be in the wrong, and she could not avoid showing that she knew it. What was she to do ? Try another tantrum of extra power ? But they had no effect whatever on him. Recall her words frankly and lay the blame of them on the feverish attack ? After all, Everard had not refused to wait : he had only objected, as any man would. This idea too crossed her mind, but was rejected with scorn. Had she not still the advantage over him in the authority she possessed ?

“ If I could only put him in the wrong,” she thought (unawares, let us hope) “ make him say something that I could bring up against him whenever he opened his mouth on the subject ! But no, of course he will not. I know he won’t.”

"You are always trying to put me in the wrong," she said at last, finding the suspense unbearable and her own irritation extreme.

"I have not done so, never did, and never would," answered Everard decisively. "You were putting yourself in the wrong through a mistake. I was trying to prevent it, and I thought I had done so."

"I tell you I will have no more of this, not a word more," she exclaimed with renewed vehemence, moving towards the door, and sweeping the skirt of her dress on one side of him in a semicircle. "I have gone on talking and talking and talking till I am tired, trying to make you understand how very wrong you have been about it all, and how dreadfully inconsiderate you are. It's of no use talking to you—I can see that, and if I go on any more I shall be laid up here and not be able to go to the Lago Maggiore, which both the doctors have said, over and over again, is the only thing for me. Now listen before I go! It *must* be as I say. It can't be helped. I can't help being ill—I am ready to drop on the floor now, though of course you don't care for that, and think it's all a pretence because I exert myself through anxiety for my children."

She paused for breath, owing to the rapidity of her utterance and movements. Everard was tempted to wonder how she could benefit her children by acting unjustly to one and deceiving both, as well as herself; but he had no time to think, for she was evidently preparing to leave the room. She walked up to the door with vigorous or perhaps feverish quickness, and with another sweep of her skirt began again. "It all depends upon you," she said: "mind that. You have it entirely in your own power to do what is for your own interest or not. I am obliged to go abroad, and I am not in a fit state (the doctors have both said so) to go without one of my family—surely you ought to have feeling enough to understand that. Sir Richard must be here for the partridge shooting, for he has asked people to come here to shoot. He can't be left here alone"——

"But can't Elfrida go with you?" said Everard, driven to desperation. "If you would only wait a very short time—a few days would do, for the settlements are ready—the marriage could take place before your journey, and Ida and I could come here, or go with you, if you like. I am ready

to give up my honeymoon, be away from Freville Chase till you come back, do almost anything, rather than have the marriage put off; and I know that Ida would say the same. Do me this great kindness, I entreat you: it is the greatest that you can do for me. The time required by the law is no difficulty, for the banns have been published already. Do let it be so. Give me the happiness of being always in your debt for the greatest favour that I possibly could receive from anyone." Here he paused for a moment. She made no reply, and he went on:

"It will take some days," he said, "to get ready for being six months abroad, especially after having been ill; and your being obliged to be away so long is a most natural and most evidently good reason for having it sooner. It will be only about ten days before the time you had named, and everyone will say that you are right. You will save yourself much dissatisfaction in your own mind, you will save yourself and Ida the annoyance of unpleasant remarks in the neighbourhood, and you will do me the greatest possible act of kindness, on Ida's account as well as my own. I don't ask you to do it for me; I ask you to do it for your own comfort and for the sake of Ida. I ask you to save her from being placed in a position the painfulness of which you know far better than I can tell you. All this didn't occur to you at the moment—and very naturally, when you had so many other things to think of; but now that I have put it all before you I am sure you will do what I ask."

But Lady Dytchley was sure that she would not. His words had penetrated her mind only: an obstinate determination to carry out her own will because it was her own, because it was opposed, and because it suited her purpose, rendered her artificially callous. Her heart was closed before the most reasonable, the most touching appeal that could have been made to a woman and a mother.

"And do you suppose for a moment," she said, "that I would allow such a thing?—That I would consent to hurrying the marriage like a wedding in a play?—That I would let my daughter marry without a proper trousseau and a proper wedding, as if I were so anxious for the honour of sending her to Freville Chase that I was ready to get rid of her anyhow. You ought to be ashamed of making so very, very improper a proposal. Have you no feeling for Ida that

you can think of marrying her in such a way, like two gipsies jumping over a broomstick?—and making her betalked about by every one as if she were running after you—I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself—and making us all ridiculous before the whole country and everywhere else, and all to suit your own convenience? I had hoped that your own sense and good feeling would have made you act very differently; but as you refuse to listen to reason, and I am too ill to go on with this miserable dispute any longer, I see that I must end the matter once for all. Ida and I start on Thursday, and the marriage will take place exactly six months to a day from now—to-day is the 7th of August. But after the painful scene of to-day it is incumbent on me to take care of myself. I cannot have you coming after us, repeating the same thing and making a scene before everybody in a foreign hotel. Now if you keep quiet, the wedding shall be on the 7th of February; but if you follow us abroad, I will put it off for two years. I can, and I will. I am not going to be bullied by you. If you don't like it, you are free to break off the marriage; and, in fact, I consider you as disengaged—remember that — ! There now, don't try to twist my words again. Come and dine with us on Wednesday, all of you, and tell me then if you have any more to say; but remember about not following us abroad, for I shall keep my word if you do. Good-bye now till Wednesday."

The long skirt disappeared through the door, trailing rapidly after her along the hall, up the staircase, and onwards. Everard remained, as it were, rooted to the spot where he stood when hearing the words, "I consider you as disengaged—remember that." This last blow was so crushing, so unexpected, that he was in a manner stunned by it, and but dimly conscious of what had passed. By degrees the whole conversation, with every look, tone and movement that had emphasised her meaning, opened out before him as if it were taking place over again, while circumstances corroborative of the worst suspicions became connected with it in his mind for the first time.

"Her late coldness," he thought, "and methodical fits of temper, her going to the Lago Maggiore just when Lady Oxborough is going there with the eldest son, her telling me to consider myself disengaged—what is all this but part of one

plan? I am not afraid of Ida (perish the thought!) but *for* her, for all the annoyances, all the sufferings that I shall be powerless to prevent. I am utterly powerless."

It was but too evident. The very embodiment of power in himself, he was utterly powerless to protect her. True she was of age, and considering their life-long engagement, under the sanction of both her parents, without any just reason whatever for breaking it, they were fairly entitled to take the responsibility on themselves: but how could that be done with a due regard to propriety, whilst Ida was at Baveno or some other place on the Lago Maggiore? Lady Dytchley had threatened to put off the marriage for two years, if he followed them, and was quite capable of remaining abroad to ensure the fulfilment of her threat. Then again, how could he measure the amount of varied pressure and misrepresentation that might be brought to bear on Ida during his absence, with all the energy of resentment and all the seeming truth of a false conscience?

"God help me! I am utterly powerless to protect her," said Everard aloud in the bitterness of his heart, when the door was opened and in walked Elfrida with the two lawyers, Hubert and the Marquis Moncalvo. Elfrida saw at once that something had gone very wrong, and without any previous knowledge guessed the cause, more or less correctly.

"Everard, there is something the matter with you," she said in a low voice. "Do tell me before you go, and if I can do anything in the world for you"——

"You dear, kind girl! I will if I can," answered Everard, turning away towards the lawyers.

The latter could only say that they regretted Sir Richard's unavoidable absence, and had to catch the train. As soon as they had gone Elfrida went up stairs, and returned in a few minutes with a note in her hand.

"My mother tells me to say," said she, looking very grave and unwilling, "that she is too tired and unwell to come down, and hopes you will all come to dinner on Wednesday."

The Marquis expressed his concern, and hoped that Lady Dytchley's indisposition was not serious. Hubert repeated within himself "My mother tells me to say," and formed his own opinion. Elfrida turned to Everard and said, "Come

with me a moment, I want to speak to you." He followed her into a kind of lumber room near the garden entrance, filled with cricket bats, battledores and shuttlecocks, targets, old galoshes, a few hyacinth glasses, and an old damask sofa.

"Read this first, in case it may require an answer," she said, putting the note into his hand. The note was as follows :—

"My dear Everard,—You must not misunderstand me. I felt very ill and had been worried besides by the pain of disappointing you which I would not have done for the world if I could have helped it. And so I am afraid I spoke unkindly to you, my nerves being so shaken that I hardly knew what I was doing. I wanted to explain too that if you were to follow us abroad it would look odd to explain to the people there who you are, and for you to be with us without explanation would have an appearance that you, I am sure, would not like for Ida's sake. I promise you to be back before the time I named, and if I do as well as I expect to do through the change of air, I will come back much sooner, so that the delay will be very short.

*"Believe me, your's affectionately,
"Charlotte Dytechley."*

"May I see it?" said Elfrida, when he had read the note.

"Do: I wish you would. And I should like to say a word to you about what it refers to."

"I thought so," said she, running her eyes down the first page and turning it over. "I saw that something was wrong. But what is it?"

"Your mother told me just now that she must put off the marriage, was going to take Ida abroad, would put it off two years if I went where they were, and considered me as disengaged. I think that is enough, considering that I have given her no cause whatever for treating me so. This note is much kinder, speaks of shortening the delay, and implies that what she said about being disengaged was said in haste; but the words have been said. They must have had some meaning, and none that can bode any good. I don't

understand it, and I don't know what to do or think. I never felt utterly powerless till now. Can you give me any clue to the mystery?"

"I can't. I have heard my mother scold Ida about being a Catholic, and tell her she was only doing it on your account, and knew better, and all that; but I have always heard her speak of the marriage as a settled thing. She has never even expressed a wish that it should not be."

"Then what is the cause of the put-off?"

"She has not told me anything about it yet; but she has been under the new doctor's care, and I suppose that she has understood him to have ordered her abroad."

"But I asked her to wait a little and put forward the wedding, and she only became very angry. No doctor would have objected to that; and, as I told her, it would prevent all the unpleasant remarks that are sure to be made if Ida goes abroad in this way, when the wedding-day had been fixed. No one will believe in the necessity of so sudden a move; and as your father's marked absence is known to everyone in the house, both guests and servants, the thing will get about, with every sort of conjecture and exaggeration. I wonder she doesn't see it."

"She will, she must. She can't really mean anything. I wish our old doctor were alive. This one is not so plain-spoken, and she may have misunderstood him to order her abroad, when he only meant to say that it would be a good thing. He will be here presently, and I will speak to him about it. He can and must put it right. Is there anything else that I can do?"

"Yes, but if it is possible, I want to see Ida before I go."

"Impossible. She is writing letters in my mother's room."

"Help her, then, as you best can. Support her—we all want support sometimes."

"You may rely upon it that I will: you may count upon me. I will not fail you."

"You are a noble-hearted girl," said Everard, leaving the room. "I shall be here on Wednesday."

"Stop! Is there any answer or message?"

"Only to thank her for her—kind note."

Elfrida hurried upstairs, and he went back to the library, where the Marquis and Hubert were waiting for him.

Shortly afterwards, the stable clock being on the strike, the hour five o'clock, and Everard on the other side of the lodge, riding back to Freville Chase with his two guests (but that was no matter), Lady Dytchley sent Elfrida to see an old woman who lived in a cottage on the farther side of the park, and Ida to get some fresh air in the shrubbery ; then betaking herself to the sofa in her bedroom, she reposed there till a knock was heard at the door and the sympathising countenance of the young doctor appeared in the opening.

"I feel very tired and ill to-day," she said, "but I have had so much to think of and so much to worry me, I quite see that I shall never be well till I can get away and have perfect rest."

"Change of air and scene is the best thing in such a case," answered the doctor.

"It troubles me very much, though, that my going abroad should—put anything off and put any one out."

"If there is anything of importance there is really no reason why"—

"Well, I think it is better as it is ; but I can't bear to put any one out."

"We can't help doing so sometimes," remarked the doctor.

"No, indeed. I wish one could. Am I to go, then ?"

He looked fixedly at her for a moment, said to himself, "she means to go," and replied—"By all means : it will—suit your case exactly."

"Then you will come to see me on Wednesday afternoon, won't you ?"

He promised to do so, and went his way, while Elfrida was hurrying onward to the cottage, that she might be in time to see him on her way back. Ida, having been duly informed of his arrival, came in from the shrubbery to her mother's room whilst he was mounting his horse at the stables.

"He left this minute—how very provoking !" said Lady Dytchley. "I wanted him to tell you, to save me from telling it, for I can't bear to disappoint you."

"Oh ! what is it ?" said Ida, turning deadly pale, as the peculiar nature of the feverish attack occurred to her, in combination with Sir Richard's portentous retirement, the

departure of the lawyers with the unsigned settlements, and her mother's refusal to go downstairs after her interview with Everard.

"What is it?" she repeated with sudden and unwonted vehemence, while Lady Dytechley appeared to hesitate. "Do tell me! I *must* know—I *will* know."

"My dear Ida," said Lady Dytechley, "don't make up imaginary evils. There is nothing dreadful in what I have to say, nothing more than what happens, more or less, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. The doctor says I am to go abroad for a bit, which will interfere with the wedding-day; but I have no doubt that the change of air and scene will set me up very soon—I feel that it will—so that the delay need be no longer than usually happens, owing to lawyers and dressmakers. That is all. I am grieved that you should have the smallest disappointment about it, but my own marriage was put off twice."

Ida breathed again; for though the news was bad enough, all circumstances considered, it was immeasurably less so than the vague terrors that her imagination had conjured up. It was worse than disappointing, but it was a relief, which was just what Lady Dytechley meant it to be.

"You will see Everard the day before we go," said Lady Dytechley, rising from the sofa; "but I must begin to think of what we must have put up. They all three dine here on Wednesday. You look pale. You have had no air to-day, and I brought you in when you were out. Do walk a little more, my child."

Ida did so readily, being anxious to review events and see Elfrida. Lady Dytechley, having suspicions of being in a dilemma, and wishing to see her way out of it, was not sorry for her absence. The dilemma was this:—Hubert Freville had paid very marked and thoughtful attention to Elfrida, and Hubert Freville was as eligible in appearance and character as in worldly position. From both points of view the probability was good, as a probability and as a match. Yet she found it advisable to do what would look very much like snubbing him, that is, to start on Wednesday morning and leave Sir Richard to entertain the guests from Freville Chase. Now she must either do this or let Everard and Ida meet again. If she chose the former alternative she would be acting imprudently for Elfrida; if the latter,

Everard's presence would produce awkward complications. Therefore, whether she did or did not start on Wednesday morning, she must outwit herself. That was her dilemma. The difficulty was graver than it seems at first sight owing to a curious combination of good and evil within her. Respecting Hubert her motives were really good. She valued him not merely for his position but for himself, for what she believed him to be, and what in fact he was. The complication regarded Everard: and here her motives were so mixed that she had ceased to understand them herself. She clung with fierce tenacity to her own religion, partly from training and habit, partly through a sort of abstract conscientiousness, fortified for opposition by the stimulating properties of a mixed marriage, and her principles, being strengthened, such as they were, by the absence of any in Sir Richard, had led her, as we have seen, to take the religion of his Catholic children into her own hands, till she looked upon the direction of it as a vested right. Thus the engagement with Everard had always been a grievance, but much more so since Ida had declared herself a Catholic, and most of all since the announcement of her marriage had disclosed indirectly the attachment of Lord Oxborough's eldest son, the very man whom Lady Dytechley would have preferred to any other. Now in respect of the man himself, personally, there was everything to be said in favour of the match, always supposing that the two facts of Ida's engagement and Catholicity were out of the way; and, as Lady Dytechley had always wished them away, it was not so difficult for her to see as she wished, when irritated by seeing the end at hand. Thus, good motives protected the bad, the indifferent supported them as being related, self-knowledge was nowhere, and combative religionism diffused itself over the whole question. The dilemma was a subjective reality.

While she was revolving these things in her own mind and in her own way, Sir Richard, tired and hungry, dissatisfied with every one, and much reduced in his own esteem, rode into the yard. He had fasted from eight o'clock in the morning (it was now past six) and ridden all about the country in that condition since half-past one, avoiding human habitations, lest he should be caught in the fact of leaving home to go nowhere. Leaving his horse at

the entrance of the yard, while the old coachman was coming out of the harness-room to take him, the weary exile made a safe entrance into the house by a back door, and sought shelter from possible lawyers or other belated guests by hurrying up the back stairs, with a view to enclosing himself in his dressing-room till he should learn that the coast was clear. At the junction of two passages he saw Ida in the distance, and becoming conscious of something within him very different from the sudden glory that Hobbes defines laughter to be, turned the other way. He had not proceeded far when a door opened and Lady Dytechley, standing before him, said with that short laugh which never boded any pleasant information :—

“Well ! so you have come back.”

“Can’t you have dinner earlier, or have something brought upstairs for me ?” said he, stimulated by the pangs of hunger, and nettled by the contemptuous reception which he knew himself to deserve.

“Dinner was not ordered later than usual,” she replied, retiring into the room, and taking a black silk mantle out of a wicker imperial. “Do come in or out. What is it ?”

“It is that I have had nothing to eat since eight o’clock, and have been riding all over the country for five hours—with the roads as hard as a brick, and the mare wanting new fore-shoes. If that isn’t something I don’t know what is. I am downright starved. I feel just like an indiarubber ball with the wind out.”

“And pray, who asked you to do all this ? If you *would* run away and leave me to do everything, why really ”——

The short laugh appropriately closed the sentence, but not Sir Richard’s mouth. Hunger annoyance and the local restrictions imposed by his fear of meeting Everard made him plead like a sturdy beggar.

“Well, I don’t know that any one asked me to go ; but it was your doing that I had to go. How could I stay, to look like a fool and worse than a fool ? You have made me break my word ”——

“Oh ! if you can say that—but, never mind. You will be sorry some day.”

“Well, but you *would* have it put off : and there were the settlements and Everard and two family lawyers, all waiting by appointment, and two strangers looking on.”

"How did *I* stay and meet them all, and do what you ought to have done, without any difficulty or bother, or making any disturbance?"

"I'm sure I don't know, and I had better not know, I think. You have ways of your own. All I know is, that if I had come in and told a long story about a doctor and Italian lakes, and sent them off with their parchments, and told Everard that I was very sorry for breaking my word, but I couldn't help it, and all that, I should never be able to show my face anywhere again. I had to get out of the way on your account, and now you won't help me to get something to eat, when I haven't had anything for ten hours and a half."

"But why come here for it?" said Lady Dytechley, avoiding the question of the doctor and the Italian lakes as unpleasant and now obsolete. "They would have made you some sandwiches in a few minutes if you had asked for them."

"Ah! to be sure," said he. "But have they all gone off—Everard and the rest?"

"Long ago—they all dine here on Wednesday," said she, as he was disappearing behind the door in quest of sandwiches. "It can't be helped, you know—just before the journey and the unfortunate postponement—and with his cousin staying there too. You *must* see him."

"I'll be"—and those were positively his last words, his last two words: they were indeed.

Elfrida had returned from the cottage, and Everard, leaving the Marquis with Hubert, was turning off to give a message to someone at a farmhouse. As soon as he had parted from them, they began to talk about him; or rather the Marquis made, perhaps accidentally, a remark that led to their doing so.

"That was a very strange proceeding," said he, "to bring him there with those notaries (or whatever they are called)"——

"They were the family solicitors."

"To bring the family solicitors with the—what is it?"

"Marriage settlements."

"And then go away. It was a gross insult, and he ought to resent it."

"That's all very well," said Hubert, opening the gate of a

wood that led down into a hollow of the Chase ; " but when a man really cares for a woman, he is not going to kick up a row and tell her father he's a fool."

" It touches his honour—there is no doubt of that," said the Marquis.

" It touches Sir Richard's not his. What would you have him do ?"

" Well, I don't say. Customs are different, and—temperaments. I am afraid that I should feel inclined to resent it strongly."

" Fight Sir Richard, eh ? What with ? Popguns in a saw-pit ? Would you dream of treating such a man seriously, even if the thing were admissible on any grounds ?"

" You are right ; but really something should be done. It is enough to make him break off his marriage. He would be quite justified in doing so, and I think he ought."

" All very well again, if the lady were out of the question ; but he has a duty to her as well as to himself."

" True, but there is a limit."

" I can't imagine how there can be any limits to the duty of being faithful to a promise of marriage ; and if there are such, his case would not be within them. They have been in a manner engaged all their lives, and any one can see how awfully fond they are of each other."

" When a woman has looked upon herself as engaged for so long," said the Marquis, " and especially when the idea has been impressed on her in childhood, as appears to have been the case with Miss Dytchley, she feels herself irrevocably bound, and if she has good principles, will love, or think she loves, the man to whom she is engaged"—

" I'll be hanged if she will, if she doesn't like him," quoth Hubert.—" There's an old tom-cat poaching. I should like to have a shot at him."

" Not always, no doubt," said the Marquis, who was not much impressed by the truth, so evident to rural Englishmen, that a tom-cat in a wood is the right animal in the wrong place. " I do not suppose or believe that Miss Dytchley does not love him entirely."

" I don't think about it," said Hubert. " I know she does."

"No doubt you are right : but has he the same feeling ?"

"I'll go bail for that," said Hubert, tugging at the farther gate, which hung a little, irritating Thunderbolt so much. that he nearly knocked the Marquis and his horse into the ditch.

The gate was opened at last, and they rode down the hollow into the Chase.

"It is difficult to know what to think and what to hope about it," said the Marquis. "If Sir Richard's very extraordinary conduct is not really intentional, all may be right ; but if it is so, and Everard Freville feels it much, the case is serious, and makes one feel great resentment on his account."

"Oh ! it was only Lady Dytechley's nonsense. Don't you see ? She wants to go somewhere abroad, and put off the wedding to suit her fancy. Everard told me so just now, when I asked him what the row was ?"

"He appears quite satisfied—which is strange, when a man has just heard that the marriage is to be deferred. But I think that you Englishmen are wiser, more practically philosophical in those things than we are."

"I don't know about our being wise," answered Hubert, "and I don't believe in philosophy having anything to do with the matter."

"It may, and it has, if the feelings are cold enough. Englishmen can reason with gravity on such things, even in their own case, when we should be maddened. So I am not afraid for Everard Freville."

Hubert thought that he heard something unusual in the tone of his voice, and looking at him suddenly, saw on his face an expression not seen before.

"What does that infernal look mean ?" thought he. "He looks just like a wicked rival in a play, staring up at the chandelier while he is telling the audience how he hates the other man. I always thought him a beast. It's gone again now, but it's all the worse, to be able to put on a face and take it off like that. Anyhow he shall have his answer."

"Look here !" he said. "You are on a wrong tack. I don't know about being maddened, and don't see any good in it. It strikes me that it's better to be sane when you think of marrying. But, as to coldness, there's about as

much of it in Everard Freville as there is inside Mount Vesuvius when the crater is quiet. Do you mean to say that you can't see that, with all the years you have lived, and all the notice you seem to have taken of people and things?"

"You are enthusiastic," said the Marquis, his countenance relapsing into its habitual expression of melancholy. "It is pleasant to find enthusiasm in these days, when it is generally represented by noise, vulgarity and a strong inclination to steal."

"What I said about Everard is a simple fact," said Hubert; "and as to enthusiasm and that sort of thing, you will find plenty of it in England. Jumping about and making a row are not the only proofs of deep feeling."

The Marquis coloured slightly, and then smiled. "You are right" he said, "and I admire your strong and distinct manner of expressing it. You have also in England a reverence for women. I suppose you have it from the Anglo-Saxons, for it was remarkable among the old Teutonic races. Tacitus describes Herminius rousing the country by an harangue, in which I principally remember that he excited the indignation of his hearers by telling them that the Romans had put forth all their strength to take captive his wife—*unam mulierculam*."

"Happily there is the same sort of feeling among us yet," said Hubert, "and I hope will always be: the country will be good for nothing if we lose it. But I don't think we can trace it so far. The mixture of races would have got rid of it before now, if there was nothing else to keep it going."

"Perhaps it would: but to what do you attribute it?"

"To country tastes and domestic habits. A man is not likely to have right feelings and principles about women, if he is always hanging about the streets and public places."

"Country tastes, perhaps, yes—for they are innocent themselves, and remove people from many temptations especially from the danger of bad examples; but surely domestic habits are an effect of the feeling I admired, not the cause of it."

"I can't say which is the cause and which is the effect, when both are of the right sort. I should say they were inseparable, and come from not being morally rotten. But they must be real, and not humbug, or they are only a do and a sell. A man may talk a lot of sickly sentimentality,

and write sonnets to a lady's pug-dog, and all that, and be nothing but outside all the time—that isn't having a right feeling about women. And he may stay indoors, bothering everybody, till he is a general and particular nuisance, and be the most selfish, ill-tempered, unloving brute unhung—that isn't being domestic."

"Very true; but I hardly understand the meaning of the words 'do' and 'sell' as substantives."

"Well, it means when a fellow tries to take you in by pretending to be straightforward, and makes you believe in his humbug, if you don't see through him. There goes a stoat after a rabbit. He'll have him to a certainty, the little beggar. Did you ever watch one of them at it?"

The Marquis confessed with becoming modesty that he had not, and as the little beggar went out of sight at the same time behind a clump of fern, he thought it unnecessary to make any further investigations, but returned into what may be called the centre of their conversation, saying:—

"The strange behaviour of Sir Richard Dytechley to-day nearly led me into philosophical discussions, for which I should apologise as being out of place during a ride through a wood, were it not that the discussion extracted some valuable opinions from you, which have taught me much and suggested more. I have enjoyed a very agreeable conversation, and I am especially glad to hear from you, who have better means of judging than I can have, that there was no intentional slight to Everard Freville."

"Oh! as to that," said Hubert, "there was nothing of the sort. Of course it was a beastly shame, and he deserved to be kicked all round his own park, but"—

"Kicked?" repeated the Marquis in astonishment.

"Yes, Sir Richard, of course; and old Everard Freville, your brother-in-law, was the man to have done it too, from what I have heard of him; but we mustn't make too much of it. Sir Richard is a trumpery sort of man, and I daresay he couldn't help it."

"But surely you would not wish Everard to do that?" said the Marquis, aghast at the idea of resenting an injury with the toe of one's boot.

"Of course not. The difference of age and their relative positions would make any want of respect inadmissible. All I meant was, that Sir Richard deserved to be treated like a

schoolboy when he doesn't behave as a gentleman should."

"Then, are schoolboys kicked?"

"Decidedly, when they deserve it. I have had occasion to kick more than one myself, before now."

At this moment Everard cantered up, and they talked of other things till they reached home. The Marquis dismounted at the gate-house. Hubert took his horse, amid many apologies, and went with Everard to the stables.

"Well," said Everard, making an effort to rouse himself, "are you satisfied now that he can ride?"

"I suppose he can, in his way," answered Hubert. "Thunderbolt nearly knocked him over into the ditch, coming out of the wood—I wish he had."

"What do you want to roll him into the ditch for? He has done you no harm."

"He hasn't had a chance, that I know of; but I advise you to look out, for I saw an expression in his eye, when he was talking about you, that I didn't like at all."

"You must have fancied it, my dear fellow. I have seen nothing of the kind in him."

"Perhaps not—I can't help that. I tell you what I saw. You have a hundred times the knowledge and sense and everything else that I have, but I am right about this. For God's sake, don't trust him!"





CHAPTER IX.



DOES he go in for piety of a morning, while he is here?" said Hubert, just before breakfast the next day.

"He was not at Mass, if you mean that," answered Everard. "But one mustn't be more Catholic than the Church. You must understand that it is not of obligation to hear Mass every day."

"So I supposed; but if a man were to take the same privilege in worldly matters, and do no more than he was obliged to do, he wouldn't advance much on his own line, whatever it might be. I know as little as possible of what Catholics do and believe, for I never got beyond the outside of one till last Wednesday when I met you again at Bramscote; but I know this much, that their religion is and must be all, or nothing, and I can't see how it can admit half measures."

"You are right in principle, and so you are of course in your comparison between what we do for our souls and what we do for everything besides"—

"Don't say 'we:' it doesn't apply to you in the least."

"*Chi più, chi meno*;" and the value of the more and the less depends very much on the opportunities we have had. If he had had nine, he would very likely have made a much better use of them than I have. But I was going to say, irrespectively of him, that you mustn't set a man down as a bad Catholic merely for not going to Mass as often as I do. I know many such who are probably very much better than myself. You must take early habits, local customs, temperament, and other things into consideration about that, and also about going to confession and Holy Communion. I

could show you exemplary Catholics who go four times a year and would never dream of going oftener. But what a preparation they make! I feel ashamed of myself when I see them poring over their old 'Garden of the Soul' which they know by heart. Of course frequent Communion (that is, as frequent as one's director considers prudent) is better in itself, for Holy Communion is the most powerful of all channels of grace, and we cannot afford to deprive ourselves of that; but there are cases where, from one cause or another, it is well to approach it less often. Some people are afraid of becoming less reverential by greater frequency, others find it better to do as they have been accustomed to do from the first. Others again are not capable of making so good a preparation if called upon to do so oftener. Don Frassinetti in his most beautiful and useful little book, '*Il Conforto dell' anima Divota*,' speaking of holy Communion, '*Il pascolo piu sostanzioso dell' anima*,' says:—*Se alle volte non è male astenersi per umiltà è sempre ben fatto non astenersi mai per amore.** And now we had better get on some other subject. You brought it all on yourself by being so hard on poor Moncalvo."

"Not a bit hard on the brute. I am glad I said it, and doubly so, because it drew you out. You spoke like a book, and I took it all in with great interest, so far from wanting to get on another subject. Why did you never take me into the chapel?"

"We were out all-day yesterday. Suppose we go there after breakfast. You will find it genuine all through. I am proud of it, and feel a sort of right to be so, because I had nothing to do with it myself. My father did it."

"I didn't mean merely going to look at it: I meant during Mass. Why didn't you take me this morning? I was up and about long before."

"You had only to open the door and go in. I never offer to take a non-Catholic to hear Mass. What is the use of it? Mass is at eight o'clock every morning, except Sundays and holy days. You have only to open the door in the hall,

* "This most sustaining food of the soul, from which, though it is not wrong to abstain sometimes through humility, it is always right not to abstain through love." *The Consolation of the Devout Soul*. Frassinetti. Translated by Georgina Lady Chatterton. Burns and Oates. 1876. P. 165.

opposite the farther door of the gallery, and go straight on."

"You rather puzzle me. If I believed as you do, I should go at everybody and try to make them believe the same : but you take it as coolly as if it didn't signify one way or the other."

"Going at people never did any good, and is likely to do very great harm. Catholic truth will no more convince a man, if his mind is not prepared to receive it, than gold leaf will stick before the wood has been sized. The only difference is, that we can prepare the wood but not the mind."

"How do you know that my mind is not ready?"

"I don't know ; but I must have some better proof than your wanting to hear Mass, before I believe that it is."

"I don't say that it is, and in fact I don't think so. I respect and admire the Catholic Church immensely, as the most wonderfully perfect institution that ever existed"—

"Which by the by, considering Who instituted it, is not at all wonderful : but I am interrupting you."

"Well I respect and admire it in every way ; but there is nothing more inside me about it, as far as I know."

"That is just why I have left you alone. If I had seen anything beyond that, I should have acted differently."

"But, how did you know what a beautiful service in a beautiful chapel might do?"

"I don't believe in people being converted so. Ceremonies are worse than nothing, apart from what they represent."

"Evidently ; but the outside sometimes attracts people to look within."

"It does ; but unless they are prepared to see straight when they look inside, they had better not look at all. To hover round the Catholic Church, in that way, is to be like a moth flying round a candle ; the light will only singe you."

"Well, I can't say I should see as you see, and I don't believe I should ; but I should look straight anyhow. Either the Catholic Church is the One True Religion, and therefore excludes every other, or its claims and promises are a most beautiful dream, the sum of the highest human aspirations. I want to make out which it is, and I wish you would help me to do so."

"And suppose you were to find out that it *is* the One True Church?"

"Why, in that case I should go in for the whole thing, of course."

"Are you prepared in that case, to suffer a good deal in consequence, as converts often have to do? For instance, not only to be shelved hereafter, as a representative Englishman, more or less shut out from public life, territorial influence and the confidence of your neighbours (for all that is certain), but perhaps to be put in to the most trying kind of false position as long as your uncle lives, to pass many of the best years of your life in poverty, checked at every turn, cramped in every taste and inclination, possibly obliged to renounce the idea of a happy marriage, or worse, to see one pass away for ever through want of present means? I am not saying that your uncle would put you in such a position: I don't think he would. But these things do happen—might happen to you—and should be faced beforehand. No one can dip into that question and be as he was before."

"Surely one can, if one has been honest about it; and I promise you to be that. Of course one can't be hurried over it."

"Decidedly not," said Everard; "but I am certain that sooner or later you will see the truth, if you enter into the question, and therefore I warned you of the trials you might have to encounter. I should not have put every possible and improbable trial before you, all at once, were I not sure that you have the stuff in you to face the whole thing, and qualities that make it better for you to do so."

At this moment the Marquis passed by the windows of the dining-room, which looked over the Chase to the east, and in a few minutes he came into the room.

"My watch has lost a quarter of an hour," he said, "and made me late. I hope that I have not kept you waiting long."

"Oh no, not at all," said Everard. "We have not even had the letters yet.—"Here they are."

The letters were put on the breakfast table, and presently Hubert, throwing down one that he was reading, exclaimed:—

"What an abominable nuisance! as if he couldn't find any other time but this"—

"What is the matter," said Everard.

"It's from my uncle at Beynham. Here he begins on two sheets of paper at once—at least he goes on to the other before he has done with the one—with a lot about people I

don't know, and don't wish to know. Well, here it is—I mean the beginning of it, which is all that concerns me, and a deal too much."

"*My dear Hubert, where have you been all this while?* (Why, I saw him three weeks ago in London.) *'I heard from'*—(I can't make out the name)—*'that you were staying at'*—Oh! I can't read that, nor the next line, but the letter came here somehow. Here is the upshot of it: *I go home to Beynham on Thursday, and shall want you to be there on the same day in good time, for some people are coming. It is not worth while to say who they are, as you will see that when you come. They are like myself, old bachelors, or else half-married men of the same kind—selfish, good-humoured, and more or less afflicted with creeping fogeyism'*—and so on. He isn't a fogey at all; and his friends are; as a rule, much pleasanter to talk to than most of the men of my own age. They don't think so much of themselves, and they take trouble to make themselves agreeable. But it's hard to be called away when I am so happy here; and I had no reason to expect it, for I never knew him ask people before the first of September. He is as kind and considerate as possible, and would leave me here, if he knew how much I want to stay: but I don't like to tell him about it, now that he has counted upon me."

"Come back as soon as you can," said Everard.

"That I will. I shall be only too glad."

"What does he mean by 'half-married men?'" said the Marquis with unaffected curiosity.

"Oh! he means one or two that go their own way and neglect their wives: they're a bad lot; only he has known them a long while, and is so good-hearted that he never gives anybody up."

"I, too, am obliged to go on Thursday, I find," said the Marquis, raising his eyes from the letter in his hand and looking at Hubert. "I am as sorry as you are, after the very kind and hospitable invitation I have had to remain. I had hoped and believed" (here he turned to Everard) "that I should be able to stay longer; and the air of Freville Chase has done me so much good, that I have abandoned the idea of going to Brighton. But, unfortunately for myself, I am called away. I must hope to make up for my loss at some future time."

"I hope you will," said Everard, as they rose from the breakfast-table. "Only write me word when you think of coming, in case of my being away from home. But I am not likely to be away long at a time. Shall you be ready to ride to Hazeley to-day? They half expect us at luncheon."

The Marquis expressed his pleasure at the proposal, and for the first time Hubert found himself agreeing with him. The horses were ordered for eleven o'clock.

"Mind, I must see the chapel presently," said Hubert.

"In half an hour, if that will do."

In half an hour Everard, followed by Hubert, opened the door corresponding with that through which Anne the housemaid had peeped at the Marquis, and passing along a vaulted stone passage, at the end of which, on the left, was the sacristy, entered the chapel.

Hubert, like other English gentlemen who make what used formerly to be called the Grand Tour, had seen the inside of many Catholic churches and appreciated them, not without critical taste in an architectural and æsthetical sense; but a Catholic church representing a living reality, with real live English people saying their prayers in it, was a new sensation. The perfume of incense when the door was opened gave him the first idea. He thought that it spanned the history of faith, from the days of Aaron to the days that are, connected the Ritual of the Old and New Testament, and bridged over the space of nearly four thousand years, with the Epiphany for its central arch.

"Here is a hint of unity," he thought, as he entered the chapel. "And of continuity, and of Divine government delegated to man, from Moses to the present Pope. It is only an outward sign, but it signifies a reality, and belongs to the greatest reality that ever existed."

His first impression on entering the chapel was strong but not distinct: he only saw a subdued light coming through stained windows and softening the outlines of a white altar that stood within a screen of carved oak. He said nothing, but knelt down for awhile, and then, returning to his former position in front of the chancel, began to distinguish.

The roodscreen was of dark oak remarkably well carved, its crucifix devotional and in good proportion with the building. The high altar, with its fretwork and pinnacles, that rose up on each side of the stained windows, was of

pure white stone, the frontal of dark ruby velvet richly embroidered. The reredos was of alabaster in alto rilievo, with a groundwork of very soft pink. The marble tabernacle was also white, but of a warmer hue and enriched with precious stones. Above the delicate tracery of its pinnacles was a crucifix under a richly carved canopy, and, above that, the chancel window. The roof was of very dark oak, having its principal beams carved, and the groined work between stencilled in warm but delicate colours. The two side altars on the right and left of the chancel arch were of white stone, like the high altar, with fretwork and pinnacles above that formed three niches and their canopies. In the central niche on the Gospel side was a statue of our Blessed Lady : on the epistle side there was one of S. Joseph. The stations, ranged along the nave, and framed in black oak, were of alabaster in alto rilievo, with a background of pale blue. They were embedded in a frieze-work of carved stone that ran all round the walls. Besides the stained glass window in the chancel there were four on each side in the cleristery, and one above the entrance, the former quatrefoil, the latter rosasse. The light was soft and warm, subdued but not dim.

Hubert examined everything and said nothing : he had never been known to remain silent so long. When he had finished and was beginning again, he said :—

“I have not half seen it: I must come again early to-morrow morning, and this afternoon too, if we get back from Hazeley in time. I suppose we must be off soon?”

“This is the sacristy on the right,” said Everard, as they left the chapel. “There is not much to see, but what there is, is good of its kind.”

The sacristy was panelled with dark oak, the lower part carved, as was also the chimney-piece, and all the furniture. When all had been seen, and they were walking back towards the hall, Hubert began to speak.

“That chapel is a sacred poem,” said he, “a practical treatise on all art, a catechism teaching by symbols. In the first place, there was perfect proportion throughout, as I think there was in what you explained to me before breakfast. In both cases there appeared to be no undue importance anywhere. In art proportion is essential to truth and so it must be in every system whatsoever : so that if I

am right in thinking that I have found it in Catholicity, I have found there an essential condition of truth. But the question is, whether I shall find it in the Catholic Church, as I half expect to do. I don't find it in non-Catholic Christianity, but just the reverse: the Established Church is like a body with a nose of one type, a mouth of another, eyes of a third, and so on. Now if I find in Catholicity an essential condition of a true system, a true Church, I shall have found a key to the puzzle; for as God cannot contradict Himself, there can only be One."

"If that key is the handiest to open the door, well and good," said Everard; "but there are other ways far simpler, more compact and more convincing. What you say about proportion is true, and the subject almost inexhaustible; but if you compare everything in the doctrine, practice, and history of the Church, your whole life will not suffice for the work, and if you do less, you will only have compared portions. The question really lies in a nutshell, and when fairly put, is so convincing, that our adversaries invariably try to complicate it. If you get hold of that, you will gradually discover facts of every sort and description that point the same way, and they will be as instructive as they are interesting; but if you begin with them, you will be like a man in a labyrinth without the clue."

"You are right—I see," said Hubert. "But what is the real question? We have not had it out about mixed marriages yet; and this is far more important."

"If you see the one," said Everard, "you will have no difficulty about seeing the other. When can you come again?"

"In November. My uncle goes off abroad then: he says that the dead leaves give him something or other. The fact is, that he hates the country and doesn't know what to do with himself there."

"What should you be doing then?"

"I hardly know. My life is an unsettled sort of thing. I ought to be going in for my degree, but he wanted me so often at Beynham that I had to give it up; and now I don't quite know what to do. I have two hunters there and lots of invitations all about, but I don't care about it. I had thoughts of travelling in the East."

"Come, and bring your horses, and remain here till he wants you again. You can travel another time."

"So I can—that will keep very well. You are the most hospitable man living. But really I don't want my horses here : I shall be just as happy without them."

"No, no ; you will want a safety-valve for your energy."

"But I shall have one," said Hubert, opening the door into the hall. "I shall have so many things to think of."

"Or rather so much in a small compass," answered Everard looking up at the clock. "We must be off in about ten minutes. You have to see what the question really is, and to keep to that ; or you will be like a man trying to find his way through a wood by turning into every by-path he comes to."

"I think I am nearly landed already," said Hubert. "There are the horses at the door."

"Don't be too sure," said Everard. "Enthusiasm is very good in its proper place, and nothing great is done without it ; but it should be a motive power, not a directing one. Would you have talked in the same way, if the chapel had been ill-proportioned and full of rubbishy decorations in the worst possible taste ? Most of our Catholic churches and chapels in England are more or less in abominable taste. To begin with, the design is generally spoiled for want of money ; then it gets decorated, some time or other, without any regard whatsoever to the style of the building ; then a pious lady gives a statue that looks as if it had come out of a hairdresser's shop ; another pious lady puts blue silk and window curtains on it, and the sacristan sticks about all the flower pots and coloured glass that he or she can get hold of. When you see these things you will be bothered, if enthusiasm has encroached on reason. You will be bothered too, if you don't distinguish between theory and practice in your idea about proportion. In theory you are right. Proportion is, as you say, essential to truth and beauty in any art and in any system, and therefore you will find it in all truly Catholic art, as in Catholicity itself ; but owing to poverty and other causes that we have no time to speak of now, Catholic art in these days falls, as a rule, very far short of what it ought to be, and if you push the analogy between doctrine and art too far, you will get into a mess. I have seen people disenchanted in that way, when they had gone farther than you have. They saw corrupt art in a church, generalised on what they saw, and inferred corruption of

doctrine. You have too much good sense to do exactly that, but you must keep your imagination in hand. You are not so near being landed as you think."

At this moment the Marquis appeared, and they set out for Hazeley, mounted as before. They arrived there a little before one o'clock, saw the little church that Sherborne had built, returned to luncheon, and mounted again about four o'clock.

While they were talking about the place and the people, especially Mrs. Atherstone, who had interested the Marquis very much and puzzled him still more, there was an ominous increase in the rate of packing at Netherwood, and mysterious whisperings in the passages. Ida was in the wood-walk, thinking of the late events and trying in vain to understand them, when she heard the sound of footsteps behind, and in another moment Elfrida said :—

"Do you know that my mother means to start to-morrow morning?"

"To-morrow morning? Oh! don't frighten me with reports of that sort. I am nearly worried to death now, and I can't bear any more."

"It's true, though, and I hurried off to tell you of it, that you might let Everard know, so that he may ride over this evening. Write a line to him and I will get some one to take it."

"How very good and thoughtful of you," said Ida, walking back towards the house; "and I took your kindness so impatiently. But I have had really so much to bear, that I hardly know sometimes what I am doing."

"I don't wonder at your not believing it. I did not, till I saw the wicker imperial locked and overheard my mother say that the break would be wanted at half-past eight to-morrow morning to take the luggage."

"Has she said anything to you about it?"

"Not a word as yet; but then I am not going."

"No; but she would naturally have told you, when you heard her give the order. And surely it concerns me more than any one, yet I am the last to know it, and now only through your thoughtful care and quickness. It is very, very strange. I never knew her think so much of her health before. It is the fault of that new doctor. He saw that she fancied going abroad, and so he recommended her to go."

"Exactly : that is his way, and a great mistake it is. If I ever have to send for him for myself, I shall tell him plainly not to do so. I don't want to be humoured like a spoilt child. If sugar plums will do one no harm, let him say so, but he has no right to let one suppose they are necessary because one happens to fancy them. You had better write your note in the library : you might find it difficult upstairs."

They reached the house unobserved, went into the library, and Ida wrote—

"My dearest Everard—I have just heard that my mother has decided on starting to-morrow morning early. Do, do ride over here as soon as you have read this. No time to write a word more.—Ida."

Elfrida put the note in her pocket, and walking as fast as she could, stopped at a cottage a little way beyond the lodge, where there lived an old woman with a half-witted son, who worked industriously at odd jobs and had a local reputation for doing errands.

"I'll go and fetch him, miss," said the old woman. "He's only chopping a bit of wood as Sir Richard give me when the old elm, down at the corner, was struck by the lightning last Tuesday night."

"Never mind fetching him," said Elfrida. "Take me to him : I am in a hurry."

The old woman led the way to an outhouse in the cottage garden.

"I want you to take this note directly to Freville Chase," said Elfrida, "and give it to Mr. Freville. Mind, you must see him and give it into his hand. Go the short way. You know the footpath."

"Yes, miss," said the errand-bearer. "I'll be off now directly."

Elfrida returned as quickly as possible to the house, and meeting Ida on her way back, said :—

"The note is on its way. Tim will be at Freville Chase by half-past five : he will save three miles by the footpath."

"Thank you so much, so very much. I was coming to meet you. The suspense was more than I could bear. So he is really gone with the note. Are you quite sure?"

"You may rely upon that. I saw him going across the footpath and walking at a good pace."

"What should I have done without you? I should have been too late to do anything. My mother has not told me yet."

"But have you seen her?"

"Yes, I have; and she talked about the journey, but never said a word about going to-morrow morning. Why is it?"

"Ask her by what train you go on Thursday. She *must* tell you then that you are going sooner, and why it is."

Ida did her best to follow this advice, but on returning to the house, was met at the top of the staircase by the maid, who told her that Lady Dytchley was trying to sleep and hoped no one would disturb her at present.

"I cannot bear it," said the poor girl, as she walked on. "And then she will want me just when Everard is here. How am I to know when he has come? Elfrida, you must help me to find out. But I must go out again. I can't stay indoors. My head feels on fire."

"You had better stay quietly in your own room," said Elfrida, "and then I can look out for Everard. Never mind why the day has been changed. It is much more important that you should see *him*. Keep out of the way till afterwards."

"I will: but he can't be here till nearly dinner-time, however fast he may ride. You will come and tell me the moment you see him, won't you?"

She followed the advice for awhile, but finding the suspense unbearable, determined to walk up and down between the house and the lodge, or a little way beyond, to meet Everard. She opened the door quickly, ran to the staircase, and had gone half-way down the stairs, when a voice was heard in the distance pronouncing the ill-omened words: — "Ida, my dear, I want to see you for a moment."

"It is always the same," thought Ida, as she turned back. "Father Johnson was away when I went to the Presbytery; and the other priest was out when I went again; and she sent for me when I was going a third time; and now I can't even see Everard, after we have been put off for I don't know how long. And the journey has been made a day sooner, so that I can't see him to-morrow as I was promised. It is all my fault, my own miserable fault,

for not seeing the other priest when I had the opportunity. It would have been all right then, for I have been baptized. There would have been no delay, all would have been done, and perhaps there would have been no journey—no put-off. I see it all. She wants to take me away, that I may not be a Catholic till after we are married. Does she really think, then, that I only want to be so to please Everard, and not because it is right? She *must* think so : but it is all my own fault. And now ”——

She was by this time in her mother's room. The latter, shutting the door, approached her expansively.

“ I wanted to see you,” said she, “ for fear you might hear the wrong end of the story and be worried about it ”—— Ida involuntarily turned her eyes towards the straps and buckles of the wicker imperial——“ and so I wanted to see you ; but I was so tired that I was obliged to rest. The fact is, the tooth which was badly stopped at Ledchester has been paining me very much all the morning, and I really must have it attended to—I ought to have gone to London about it some time ago—and so there is nothing for it but to go to-morrow. There will be no time if I don't. But I will leave a message with your father, for Everard to come and see you in town on Thursday. He will go by the first train at six o'clock, so that you will be with him all the afternoon, and see him next morning too. Is your father in? If he is, I will give him the message for Everard now, or write it down.”

“ Shall I go and see if I can find him? ” said Ida. “ He may be somewhere about, and I want a walk very much.”

“ Do,” answered Lady Dytchley. “ Take your walk, and ask him to come here if you can find him.”

“ After all,” thought Ida as she left the room, “ I am better off than if we were to start on Thursday ; for I shall see more of him in London than I should at dinner to-morrow, and I shall see him presently besides, and be able to talk without interruption. How very ungrateful I was, to think that everything was against me, and that I should miss seeing him altogether.”

“ Never mind about looking for your father,” said Lady Dytchley. “ I can tell him afterwards. You had better take your walk.”

Ida's heart bounded within her, nevertheless. As soon

as the door was shut, she hurried out of earshot, flew downstairs, and seizing a hat off the hall table, walked at her utmost speed towards the lodge.

While she was walking between the Lodge and the village, looking out for Everard, Everard, having returned from Hazeley, was strolling through the Chase with Hubert, the Marquis Moncalvo was coming across the courtyard to join them, and Tim the trusty messenger was turning in at the gatehouse.

"Where be I to go?" thought Tim. "I'm to give it to the Squire hisself. Who's that a-coming? He don't look like nobody about here."

"Please, sir," said he, planting himself in front of the Marquis, "where be I to find the Squire? I've got a letter for him, as Miss Elfrida said I were to give into his own hands."

"You will find him in the Chase," said the Marquis. "Stay, I am going to walk with him, and I can give him the letter if you like."

Suiting the action to the word, he took the note from Tim's outstretched hand and walked on. Tim stood scratching his head and trying to collect his mind, which was not adapted for managing two ideas together.

"That wasn't it," said he after a while. "I were to give it to the Squire and not to nobody else. Please, sir," he bawled out, "I were told to give it to the Squire hisself."

But the Marquis had walked fast and was by this time out of hearing. Tim stared for a minute or two, then started off in pursuit, and followed him till he disappeared behind a distant clump of trees.

"Well, I never!" said Tim. "What ever were I a-doing of. It's all along of staring at him because I couldn't tell who he were. Whatever will Miss Elfrida say?"

While Tim was wending his way homewards, much troubled in his mind at having, he knew not how, entrusted the note to vicarious delivery, the Marquis, note in hand, was looking about for Everard and Hubert. He walked fast, and they walked slowly, but he had so long delayed following them that they were out of sight, hidden in a hollow of the Chase or behind a clump of fern. After going some distance and turning in various directions, at cross-purposes with that which they had taken, he relaxed his

pace and began to entertain the idea of solacing himself with the fragrant weed that cheers the heart and is good against miasma. While opening his cigar-case and meditating as to whether he should choose a big cigar, a small cigar, or a cigarette, all three being present therein, he found the note inconvenient to hold, and put it in his pocket. By this time Everard and Hubert were far away. He continued looking for them for some time longer, but at length, finding the search hopeless, returned to the house and wrote some letters. The letters occupied him till dressing time, the note, being light and of imperceptible size, remained unobserved in the pocket of his morning coat when he dressed for dinner, and the result was, that when he met Everard, he had forgotten its existence.

Most of us have, at some time or other, and probably more than once, felt a prickly heat over the surface of the head on discovering that we had forgotten a note or a message entrusted to us ; but owing to the British habit of appreciating pockets and frequently manipulating their contents, the delay is seldom of much importance. Few would have liked the responsibility of forgetting that note.

The dinner passed off as before. The Marquis talked well on a variety of subjects, Hubert talked more or less at cross purposes with him, and Everard with extraordinary tact harmonised the conflicting elements of the conversation. Father Merivale was not present. After many subjects had been exhausted, and silence was creeping into notice, Everard began to talk of Hazeley, its owner, the little church he had built, and anything else concerning him that might happen to suggest itself. As this led on to a description of Sherborne's life, which amounted to an epitome of the book named after him, the story lasted till long after they had left the dining-room. They had now gravitated to the upper landing of the carved oak staircase that led out of the hall. It was late, and they were talking of Mrs. Atherstone. Everard told all he knew about her, and when he had finished they began to separate for the night.

"She is the most remarkable woman I ever met," said the Marquis, taking up his candle. "The manner in which she converted herself was unlike anything I ever heard."

"Yes," said Hubert, "there is no humbug in her. She means what she says. I wouldn't give a rap for a Catholic who isn't thorough about his religion."

"Spoken like yourself," said the Marquis. "I like to see enthusiasm, especially at your age." Hubert made no reply, and they went to their rooms. When the Marquis had gone into his, Hubert followed Everard and said:—"What does he poke about the tower for? I caught him there this afternoon, just before we went out walking."

"Why not?" answered Everard. "Any one who cares for antiquity, as he does"—("Bosh!" interrupted Hubert)—"would want to see the tower. I ought to have shown him over it. He can't please you anyhow, not even by complimenting you on your enthusiasm."

"I should think not, when it was only to get out of what I said. Well! I am glad he is off the day after to-morrow, at any rate; "for if not, I should throw over my uncle and stay to look after him. I know he means mischief."

Hubert went to his room. Everard went to his, on the east side of the court, but did not remain there. He exchanged his candle for a lamp with a glass shade over it, and walked along the corridor till he came to a massive oak door that moved on enormous hinges. This door opened into the tower through a wall ten feet thick, and was the only way into it on that floor. A passage with low doors on either side led to a spiral stone staircase, and as there was no door at the end of the passage, the draught from the opening in the wall justified the precaution of carrying a lamp instead of a candle. On opening the farther door on the right, he entered a room of moderate size, with a window opposite looking to the east. The window had a stone mullion down the centre, below which the window-seat, formed by the thickness of the wall, sloped a little downwards to the height of about two feet and a half, so that you could step on it easily and have a fine view of the Chase. Oak book-shelves covered the wall on each side of the door and about half-way round the corner on the right. The other half of that side was filled with enclosed receptacles for papers and books. The book-shelves were well and solidly furnished, containing materials for varied and extensive reading. On the left side of the room was an open fireplace, with dogs for burning wood, and a carved oak

chimney-piece above. On either side of it on the pannelled wall hung one of the Arundel Society's chromolithographs—the Death of St. Francis, and the Adoration of the Kings by Luini. Right and left of the window there was a large chest of carved oak with shelves above, holding a gun-case or two, a large bottle of ink, his father's favourite hunting whip, some old school books, and several bundles of miscellaneous prints tied up with string. An oak writing-table, containing a Crucifixion in a triptych and a large old-fashioned desk, stood in the middle of the room, covered with letters, scribbled paper and literature of various kinds, periodical and otherwise, including several books of anti-Catholic controversy that had been forced on his notice by being forced on Ida's. A leather arm-chair, two Glastonbury chairs of ample size, and a banner-screen with the Freville arms embroidered on it by his mother, completed the furniture of this his private sitting-room.

"I ought to have put this back before dinner, when I had done with it," said he, taking up a map of the estate. Then he unlocked a drawer, took out a bunch of keys, large and small, strung on a thick piece of leather, and left the room, lamp in hand.

He went out of the passage and up the stone staircase into another storey of the tower. On the left of the landing was a low door, and beyond it a winding passage that led to another spiral staircase much narrower than the principal one. Behind the staircase, which just gave you room to pass, was a small panelled room partly furnished as a bedroom. Half-way up the stairs a downward flight of steps, with a sharp turn at the bottom to the right, led to a heavy door studded with iron. This was the muniment room. Everard unlocked an old oak-chest, placed the estate-map in it, and turned the key. It was a strangely romantic scene. The full moon, shining through a long window, between each mullion of which were shields of stained glass richly coloured, sent a stream of warm light into the room, mellowing the stone walls, groined roof and quaint furniture where it fell, and leaving the rest in undefined shadow. Everard had never been there so late at night, and he involuntarily looked around.

"What a curious effect!" he thought. "I never saw

such warmth of light and depth of shadow in a room, except on the stage. It only shows how well they imitate nature there. The difference is that they can choose what to copy, whether it be scenery or character, whilst in real life we have to take it as it comes, and the exceptional cases are so rare that they seem unreal. How distinct that old inscription is in the moonlight!"

This was the prophecy that Mrs. Sherborne had copied and put in her album. It was rudely carved over the stone arch of the doorway.

"I had better leave the archæologists to their own inventions about that, when they come here," thought Everard, as he locked the door. "If I tell them what the end of it really was, they will think I am 'poking fun at them,' though it fulfilled the words exactly. I wonder how it came there. One would like to have some evidence as to how, or why, or by whom it was written. Most likely it was a flight of predictive imagination that came true by accident."

Returning to his private room within the tower, he replaced the keys and sat down at the writing-table, but had hardly begun to arrange his thoughts when he heard a knock at the door, and looking round, saw Mrs. Roland standing before him, carrying in her hand a lamp of like construction to his own.

"You are up late to night," said he, "and so am I, for I have much to do that I ought to have done before. What have you on hand now?"

"Mr. Everard," said she, shutting the door, "have you seen any one about the tower?"

"No one except the cat, who followed me in."

"Nor heard anything up the other stairs?"

"Nothing at all. I went to put back the estate-map in the muniment room."

"The Marquis has been prying about there, late last night and again this afternoon, when he stayed behind instead of going out walking."

"*Ecce iterum Crispinus*," thought Everard. "She is as bad as Hubert. What has the poor fellow done, that he is to be always suspected? What bad motive could he possibly have in looking at the tower. If I were a stranger here I should certainly go all over it as often as I could."

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"I was thinking," said she, "that it would be as well to keep it locked."

"I can do that, if you like," said Everard—"lock myself in and out. But I don't see what harm he can do here."

"We can't tell. There are many things we don't see through, and yet can make out enough to know that we must be careful."

"Very well, then, if it will make you more comfortable, the upper door shall be kept locked while he is here; but I don't see anything odd in his wanting to see this old tower, for it is really worth going some distance to see. Any one would do the same."

"Not when people are in bed, nor yet when he it belongs to—and who would have taken a pleasure in showing it—was out of the way."

"Well, but it was my fault, for not having shown it to him. I will to-morrow, hiding-hole and all."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Roland, in a tone that made the interjection seem to say, "I never could have believed this of *you—you* who—oh!"

"I won't show him the hiding-hole if you wish me not to do so," answered Everard. "But why are you so particular about it?"

"He is not worthy of being taken there," said she, "where holy priests, one of them a martyr, passed so many hours, for the love of God and the salvation of souls, with hardly room to turn round, and in danger of rack and gibbet every moment. He would only stare, as if he were looking at a peep-show."

"If worthiness were a condition," thought Everard, "most of us would see very little." "Very well," he said, "to satisfy you, I promise not to take him there."

"Mr. Hubert can be taken some day when he comes again," said she. "And the key?"

"I promise you to keep the upper door locked while the Marquis is here. He goes on Thursday. When I leave here to-night I will take the key with me. But suppose he should happen to be in the tower, counting the stone steps or measuring the thickness of the wall! There he would be, locked in with the cat and one candle, that would go out before he had done with it, if it hadn't blown out before."

"Serve him right!" said Mrs. Roland. "What business has he prowling about the tower at all sorts of times"——

"Only twice, you said, I think," interposed Everard.

"And enough, too," said she, "considering that he watched you out yesterday before he did so, and came here again last night, after every one was in bed but myself. I had remained up late to finish some work for the fancy bazaar they are to have at Ledchester for the new church, and as I was coming up the back stairs I caught sight of him creeping in here (into the tower I mean) with his hand over the candle, to keep it from being blown out by the wind."

"But what harm could he do, or want to do, here?" said Everard.

"I can't say; but seeing is seeing," answered Mrs. Roland preparing to retire.

"Well, anyhow," said Everard, "I will take care to lock the door as you wish. Good-night."

Mrs. Roland went her way, and Everard turned his attention to other matters. The first thing he did was to finish the last of twenty-eight foolscap pages that he had promised to write for Ida in reply to a book of anti-Catholic controversy. When he had done this, and put the seven sheets into a large envelope, it was half-past two o'clock. "She has no need of this herself," he thought; "but it will help her to put down people, if they bother her."

Then he began to think of all that had lately happened, would happen, and might happen. A little before daybreak a certain fizzing and spluttering in the wick of his lamp warned him to leave the tower. As he groped his way back to his bedroom, carrying the extinct lamp and the heavy key of the tower, which he had locked, in obedience to Mrs. Roland's injunctions, he said to himself:—

"After all, how much longer many of the knights in the Middle Ages often had to be kept waiting: only they had active work to do in the meanwhile, and some control over events through their own exertions, whilst I am hedged in by such a combination of checks that I am forced into utter passivity. Nothing however turns out as it looks at first, but always either better or worse; and Lady Dytechley's note promises a much shorter delay than she spoke of when I saw her." He had now reached the door of his bedroom.

When he opened it, a faint greyish light on the farther side of the room showed that morning was just beginning to dawn.

"*Homo ad duas res, ad intelligendum et ad agendum est natus*," he thought, as he put the key of the tower into a drawer; "but I am required to keep the tower locked against Moncalvo without being able to see any reason whatever for doing so."

The greyish white light had grown pink, the pink had deepened into a transparent rose colour, and the sun had risen above the hills to the right of Netherwood, before he fell asleep, thinking of the carriage horses that were to arrive at ten o'clock on trial, and the lady's horse, as yet unfound, to carry Ida.

CHAPTER X.



WHEN Everard awoke, after a broken sleep of less than two hours, the first impression on his waking mind was that a horse must be found, and should be found, worthy of carrying Ida. He had seen every lady's horse on sale within twenty miles, had most of them two or three days in his stable, examined each carefully, tried each in every way, and rejected them all. One shied, another had a heavy mouth, another had an upright shoulder, another was inclined to jump about when his head was turned towards home, another showed symptoms of a sullen temper, another had contracted feet. And none of them pleased him either in shape or action. After balancing the pros and cons and calculating the probabilities, he came to the conclusion that, as a last resort, the quiet hunter on which he had mounted the Marquis could be made into a good substitute for the ideal animal he wanted; nevertheless he wrote several letters of appointment to horse dealers and horse-breeding farmers, and another concerning the transmission of the new harouche he was having built for Ida, between the hours of half-past six and a quarter to eight.

On his way to the chapel he found Hubert walking up and down the hall, and evidently waiting for him.

"I should like to go to Mass," said Hubert. "I wish you would show me what to do."

"The best thing you can do is to pray for guidance," answered Everard.

After Mass Hubert made another critical examination of the chapel, found there the same beauty of proportion as before, drew inferences more or less as before, compared them with Everard's answers, and was unusually silent when he came out.

As he opened the door into the hall on his way to breakfast, the Marquis Moncalvo passed by, and said :—

"You make me feel ashamed of myself for my laziness. I am afraid that I have verified the old Italian proverb, '*Il campanile non migliora la cornacchia*'; for, with a chapel in the house, and a perfect gem too, I have not been to Mass except last Sunday. The fact is that I have sat up late every night reading."

"Getting up early is like taking medicine," remarked Hubert, partly to himself: "it does one good, but it is not pleasant."

"You are right," said the Marquis. "I ought to have heard Mass."

"You will have a chance to-morrow morning," said Hubert, walking on sturdily towards the dining-room.

"I must lay some of the blame on Sir Walter Scott," said the Marquis. "It was 'Guy Mannering,' that enticed me to sit up so late."

"No wonder," said Everard, who had come out of the dining-room to wish him good-morning. "I like it the best of all his novels. It seems to me perfect throughout."

"I have seen a Gilbert Glossin in real life," said Hubert, "only he hasn't the same opportunities, nor the excuse of being a blackguard by profession."

"I have had to deal with one, a man I had befriended, too," said the Marquis; "and I lost a considerable sum of money through him when I was a very young man. Will you excuse me for a moment? I left my pocket-handkerchief upstairs."

Said Everard to Hubert as soon as the Marquis was out of hearing :—

"Do be quiet, if you can ; but I believe you can't help it. You put me into such a position, talking at a fellow in that way. And it isn't fair ; for he never resents anything you say, though he is quite capable of answering you, if he chose to do it."

"I am sorry to annoy you, my dear fellow, very ; but, as you say, I can't help it, and I know that I am right in not being able to help it."

"Oh yes, he flatters me, and makes out that I know a lot more than I do. There is some bad meaning in it, I am sure ; and he has some design or other."

"Well, do, for my sake, try to be civil to him while he is in this house. He won't be here when you come in November."

"Who could refuse to do anything he asked," thought Hubert, "when he looks at one with that wonderful expression, so strong and wise, and so saintlike ? I will," he said. "I promise you to be civil while he is here—I can't say what I might do if I met him elsewhere. I would do anything in the world for you, and I would believe in him, to please you, if I could ; but I can't. In my opinion the old women of Chase End are right in the main, though I daresay they have embellished their facts. I know that I have bothered you a good deal about him, and I am sorry to have done so ; but I did it, however awkwardly, in your interest. I am a great fool in most things : I know very little that I ought to know, and most of the little I do know, that is worth knowing, I have learned from you in these few days ; but I am right about this. Now I don't ask you to believe this thing or that about him. All I say is, Don't trust him. Don't place the smallest confidence in him. Mind what you say before him, and how you look. Give him as little as possible to imagine an opinion about, or—There he is again."

Hubert kept his promise and was very civil, but silent. After breakfast Everard went to look at the carriage horses, and as they had not yet come, he rode off with the Marquis in quest of a lady's horse belonging to a farmer near Bramscote. After rejecting the horse at first sight, and the carriage horses when he tried them on his return home, they all three took a walk in the Chase. Then Everard offered to show the Marquis over the tower, and presently did so,

having first replaced the key in the door, for the sake of appearances.

As they were walking upstairs Hubert drew him on one side under the pretence of showing a letter, and whispered :—

“Don’t show him the hiding-hole, whatever you do. I can see it another time.”

Everard made a gesture of assent, and went on, thinking that either Hubert and Mrs. Roland were afflicted with monomania, or himself with an exceeding obtuseness of mental vision.

When they came to the door of the tower, the Marquis remarked that he should like to have a drawing of it, and Everard replied that he had a photograph somewhere taken by somebody, and would give it to him if he could find it. They then went into the rooms nearest the entrance, and back again till they came to Everard’s private sitting-room. The Marquis was enthusiastic in his admiration of its mediæval appearance and the solid character of the books on the shelves. Hubert noticed everything and said nothing. Everard heard, and answered accordingly, but was thinking that the room would be of no use to him unless it would suit Ida too. They then went downstairs, looked at everything there, came up again by degrees, and stopped at the foot of the upper staircase with the panelled room behind it. Having seen this, they went upstairs, and then down into the muniment room, which the Marquis admired more than anything he had seen.

“You should have seen it last night in the moonlight, when I came here to put back an estate-map,” said Everard. “It would have done for the scene in Faust, when the Doctor soliloquises just before the appearance of Mephistopheles.”

“And was ready to give all he had worked for,” said the Marquis, “all he could call his own, natural or acquired, for a woman’s love. No wonder. It *is* worth the whole world.” He spoke with unusual warmth. For a moment or two the polished reserve, that repelled investigation whilst seeming to invite it, had almost disappeared, and his countenance betrayed a mingled expression in which good and evil seemed to be pleading each other’s cause : but it passed away in an instant and left no trace behind.

“I wish I were you,” he said to Hubert, “with life before

me, and fresh hopes and opportunities. Youth is generally supposed to be the time of illusions and of preparation for disappointment, but need not be so, ought not to be so, is not always so. It is the time for preparing the true realities of life. Happiness is the only reality."

"It *is* a big one, when we can get it," said Hubert, looking as civil as he could, to please Everard.

"There are two or three rooms over there," said Everard, as they left the muniment room, "and that is all."

"Is there not a hiding-hole somewhere," asked the Marquis, "where priests were concealed in times of persecution? I remember hearing of it, during my first visit to Freville Chase many years ago."

"There is no getting at it now," answered Hubert readily.

"I am sorry that we can't see it," added Everard, feeling half ashamed of himself, but very grateful to Hubert for his adroit manner of expressing the impossibility.

"No doubt they made the approach to it as difficult as possible," said the Marquis, "and probably they had steps of wood or of ropes, which of course have decayed."

"Yes, they did all sorts of things," answered Hubert. "I have heard of a place where they went up the chimney and got somehow into the wall, like the rats and mice."

"I am afraid that we ought to be going," said Everard, moving onwards. "We shall have to start for Netherwood in little more than half an hour."

"Is it so late as that?" said the Marquis. "How quickly time goes when it is agreeably spent. I have passed an hour in this most interesting place, and I feel as if I had been here only a few minutes. It is always so in human life. The happy hours are few, and they pass as quickly as a tropical sunset."

"It is generally supposed that they do," said Hubert, "but I am rather inclined to doubt the fact. I suspect that, if we took the measure at the time, we should find it different. I don't believe that God would take away from what He gives."

"You have given me quite an original view of the subject," said the Marquis: "at least I never heard it before."

Everard said nothing, but was quite sure that the time passed with Ida had an emphatic measurement while it was passing.

They now left the tower, went to dress, and half an hour afterwards met again in the hall.

"I hope the old family coach won't break down," said Everard. "It was built when my grandfather married, I believe, and to my certain knowledge has not been in use these twenty years. Old Sandford has got a pair of screws from the White Hart of Lyneham; and there he is, coming round to the door."

"It all looks uncommonly well," said Hubert, "and very imposing. How well he has rubbed up the old harness. And the horses are of a good stamp too, and look well. And how well he sits on the box! I like the turn-out immensely."

"So do I," said the Marquis: "it is so dignified, and so suitable to the character of Freville Chase. It reminds one of a world that has passed away as completely as if it had never been. Europe has become so vulgarised, and is growing worse, especially on the Continent. As for Italy, since the"—

He turned away and began to notice the arms on the family coach.

"The spirit of revolution," said Everard, "vulgarises whatever it touches, because it is essentially pushing, and covets what is not its own. It is nearly everywhere now, more or less, though not everywhere in the same degree nor pursuing the same external policy."

The Marquis replied by a melancholy shrug of the shoulders, took his place in the old coach, and talked of other things.

The screws from the White Hart went so well that punctuality erred by excess, causing them to reach Netherwood early enough to meet Sir Richard returning from his ride. He caught sight of the carriage as he was crossing the park, and cantered up to the stables. Everard perceived the movement and felt a sudden misgiving.

"What can it be?" he thought. "What new trouble to make him get out of my way? He has time enough to dress, for we are much too soon. There must be something wrong."

He tried to reason himself out of the suspicion, but it increased as they went on, till it became a presentiment of indefinite evil. When they stopped at the door the bell sounded hollow, as if it were ringing through empty vaults. The house looked uninhabited, the air felt chilly and stagnant. He had hardly entered the hall when the butler put a note into his hand. The writing was Lady Dytechley's. "I will follow you directly," he said to the Marquis, and turning towards the door, opened the note. It was dated Wednesday morning, but the W had evidently been made out of a T, and a stain of wax in a corner of the envelope—it was only fastened with gum—suggested the idea of candlelight, an idea which, at that season of the year, had a closer connection with Tuesday evening than with Wednesday morning. As a rule, men are not quick at discovering such little slips of caution, and Everard was not quicker than others in that particular line; but he saw this and saw through it. The note was as follows:—

"My dear Everard,—

"I cannot express how grieved I am at being obliged to dissappoint you about seeing Ida before we go. I had arranged as you know for you to come here to-day on purpose, and we were to go to London to-morrow; but having unfortunately arranged to start from Folkestone with Lady Oxborough instead of joining them in Paris as I first thought of doing has put everything out, for it obliges me to go to London to-day, as otherwise I should not have time to have my tooth stopped, which has been giving me great pain for the last two days. But unfortunately that is not all. Lady Oxborough is obliged to be in Paris on Friday, and so I cannot get off going with her after promising to do so, and she having made all her arrangements, I am terribly afraid that there is no train soon enough to take you to London before we leave. I thought at first that you might go up by the mail train and catch us at Crawley's Hotel, which is where we shall be, but the very tide is against us. I find that we must leave London this evening to catch the boat. It is really too provoking, but who could have foreseen that Lady Oxborough would be obliged to start a day sooner or that the stopping would have come out of my tooth? I am very very sorry for all this, and would have made things different if I could. I gave you my reasons

before for wishing you not to follow us abroad, and I am sure you must see the force of what I said and why it should be as I say on Ida's account, but if you will please me in this, I for my part promise you to return as soon as ever I feel that I can. Everything will be ready so that the wedding can take place within a week of our return.—Yours affectionately,

“Charlotte Dytchley.

“P.S.—In the hurry of getting off at this dreadful hour in the morning I have made two blunders. First I began to date my note Tuesday and made a great blot in putting it right, and then let the wax fall from a candle on the paper while I was sealing a parcel. I am afraid you will find my scrawl very difficult to read.”

When he had read the note he stood for a while holding it in his hand, his eyes fixed yet not seeing, his limbs rigid, his face ashy white, even to the lips. At length, hearing footsteps, he turned instinctively, and opening the door, went out into the park; but before he had gone many yards he felt a hand on his shoulder, and saw Hubert plant himself before him.

“For God's sake tell me what is the matter,” said Hubert.

“Enough for one day, and rather too much,” answered Everard with unnatural calmness, and in a voice that was not his own. “It took me by surprise. But you had better not leave Moncalvo”——

“The devil take Moncalvo! I *must* know what has happened, and how I can serve you. Will you not trust me?”

“There is no one that I would sooner trust. Look here, then. You remember the wedding being put off the other day, and the sudden journey abroad. Now read this.”

“Hubert took Lady Dytchley's note, read it through, and said:—

“If one could only believe it all! It looks fair enough at first sight, but it proves too much and explains everything too neatly. The doctor, and the dentist, and Lady Oxborough's engagement all of a sudden in Paris, and the correction of Tuesday into Wednesday, and the wax falling on the paper from a candle that was lighted to seal something else, are too many accidents close together. And I don't like that expression, ‘would have made this different

if I could.' It is too guarded, and may be taken in more ways than one. So she left this thing for the butler to give you, and hadn't the decency to send you a note this morning"——

"If she had, I could have gone to London," said Everard. "It is evident that she meant all the time to keep me away, and made the dentist and Lady Oxborough suit her purpose. I don't mean to say that she hadn't a toothache, or that Lady Oxborough had no engagement in Paris; but there was nothing to prevent her joining Lady Oxborough in Paris a few hours later, which would have enabled me to see them in London. But there was no occasion even to do that. If she had sent me a note on Tuesday afternoon, when she had made up her mind to start the next morning, I could have gone by the same train and been with them till they left for Folkestone. It is impossible for me to deceive myself about it. She meant it and contrived it."

"I am afraid you must give her her head for a while," said Hubert after a pause, "on account of what she swears that the doctor said, and because Sir Richard is (begging your pardon) a beastly sneak! but it can't go on for long. Lady Dytchley can't, for very shame, stay abroad beyond a few months at the furthest. People would begin to talk, if she were to keep out of the way long under false pretences, after the wedding day had been fixed, neglecting one daughter altogether and leaving Sir Richard to look like a fool about it."

"I told her so," said Everard, "and it had no effect whatever."

"Very likely not, but she must act upon it all the same. She cares very much for what the world says."

"She does; but when people deceive themselves by a false conscience, as she is doing about this, they see things as they wish to see them."

"Yes; but there is a limit, and people's tongues will let her know, if she goes beyond it."

"What you say is perfectly true," answered Everard. "But there is more than that."

"I can't see what there can possibly be. The only other thing she could do would be to go on putting off, after their return, with a view to breaking off the engagement. And that she would not dare to attempt; it would be too gross

a case before the world she so highly respects. People can't defy the world, when the world is in the right and they are in the wrong. But suppose that she did try it on, and Sir Richard made no sign. Your remedy would then be plain : you then would not only have the right to marry in spite of her, but, under the circumstances of the case, you would be bound to do so, for Miss Dytchley's sake as well as your own."

"Unquestionably I should : but, as you said, she would never try to do that."

"Then what is it? There is something on your mind. But perhaps I am going too far."

"No. I give my confidence fully or not at all. There *is* something on my mind. But it isn't the postponement itself, though that is enough, I think, after having been already obliged to wait so long, in consequence of coming of age four years later than the usual time. It is not that, nor is it the way in which the thing has been done. It is the position—of Ida : it is *the* position—away there, solitary, helpless, exposed to subtle annoyances that weary the heart and puzzle the will, like water dropping in a dungeon. You understand me, I think."

"I do. It is horrible to bear, unbearable : but you are not called upon to bear it. What Lady Dytchley says, about not going where they are, is all nonsense."

"Of course : but she threatened to lengthen the time if I do, and she is quite capable of not only being 'not at home' if I went, but of going off suddenly without saying where to; so that I should only make things worse. You know what Sir Richard is."

"Yes, he can be depended upon to do nothing. You are right : I see that you mustn't go. But *I* can, and I will too, any time you wish me to do so, after my uncle leaves Beynham. It would be better than nothing, for I can back myself not to be taken in."

"You are a true friend in my greatest need," said Everard, turning back towards the house on hearing the sound of carriage wheels.

"I only wish that I could prove myself to be so in some more effective way," answered Hubert. "This is the most infernal piece of overbearing injustice I ever heard of, and shows an amount of dishonesty, heartlessness, bumptious

ill-breeding, and utter inability to appreciate who and what you are, that I should never have expected to find in the mother of such daughters as hers."

The carriage wheels, whose sound reminded them of the hour, proved to be those of a covered wagonette containing two young ladies, round and rosy daughters of the rector. Everard drew back as they passed, and coming into the room while their entry was apparent, took up his position gradually, so that when the two young ladies had fallen back in small conversation with the Marquis and Hubert, he was apparently doing likewise. Sir Richard, notwithstanding the sudden rapidity of his return home, had as yet been unable or unwilling to appear.

Elfrida, who guessed the cause of Everard's absence, talked about anything or nothing till the Marquis and the two rubicund young ladies were fairly engaged in conversation, and then said in a low voice:—

"Why didn't you come here yesterday evening?"

Everard became as pale as when he read Lady Dytchley's note.

"What do you mean?" he said. "I never heard anything about it. I was told to come now."

"Didn't you get a note from Ida, that I sent to Freville Chase by half-witted Tim, who was never known to fail in taking a message? I sent him off myself at half-past three o'clock, and saw him go. He must have got there by six o'clock. Were you at home?"

"I was walking in the Chase with Hubert."

"And no one gave you the note? I must see Tim to-morrow morning, and find out what is the meaning of this. But, Everard, how dreadfully pale you are—so unlike yourself. I am sorry I told you. I spoke too suddenly, because I was so anxious for you. But don't let it worry you. Dear Everard, don't look like that—don't, for Ida's sake. You look so dreadfully ill."

"I am quite well," he said: "I am, really."

"But I see you are not," interrupted Elfrida, "and you don't speak like yourself. That voice is not like your own."

"It was the last feather that made the load heavy to bear," answered Everard. "It is impossible for me not to feel this last blow very acutely. To know that I might have seen

her before she went, and that—but we had better not talk of it any more just now.”

Elfrida instinctively looked round and saw the Marquis's eyes in the act of turning away from him.

“I hate that man!” she said. “I saw such a bad look in his eyes just now, when he looked this way; and there was just the same the other day, when the settlements couldn't be signed. Don't trust him, whatever you do.”

“It is a very strange thing. Hubert says the same, and Mrs. Roland. I can't conceive why, for I have nothing to do with him. He has been a guest at Freville Chase for a few days, and he goes away to-morrow morning. There is nothing for me to trust him about.”

“No; but you must take care not to let him get hold of anything. Let him see as little of you as possible before he goes.”

“Go home on the box to-night,” said Hubert, who had drawn the other round young lady into conversation with the Marquis. “You ought to try how those horses go, for they might suit you. One often picks up valuable horses in that way. You *must* drive them a bit, and this is a good opportunity. I will do the talking inside.”

“How kind of you to help me,” said Elfrida: “and you came just at the right moment.”

“I was looking out, and listening too, I am afraid,” said he, remaining near her whilst Everard took the place he had left.

At this moment Sir Richard appeared, immediately followed by the butler, who shortened unpleasant references by announcing that dinner was on the table.

Sir Richard approached nimbly, shook hands with the two round young ladies, the Marquis and Hubert, looked about as if expecting some one else, and said:—

“He's not here after all. I suppose he was kept somewhere. How are you, my dear Everard? I had asked the priest who is supplying for Father Johnson; but he won't come now, for it's very late. I was—was kept by—by—well, it's no use. I am so—Elfrida will have told you—I never was so annoyed. It was all because Lady Oxborough had to be in Paris sooner, and they had agreed, you know, to go together. I never was so put out; but they will be back very soon, very soon. Well, as he isn't here, we had better go in to dinner.”

And giving his arm to the elder of the two round young ladies, he walked off to the dining-room, saying to his inner consciousness, "I have done that."

Hubert took in the second round young lady, and the Marquis took Elfrida. Everard, as belonging to the family, was the odd number, and found himself next to Sir Richard; whereat the latter so exerted himself in conversation with the young lady on his right, that she was amazed at his loquacity. Hubert spoke to nobody but Elfrida, and when the ladies left the dining-room, did not utter a word to any one. Sir Richard sat in his place prosing on various subjects and drawing out the Marquis till nearly ten o'clock. Soon afterwards the old coach was announced. At the door Hubert said suddenly as if the idea had just occurred to him :—

"I wish you would try those horses. They might suit you."

Everard took the hint, but not the reins. He was thinking of the lost note. Before they reached home he told the coachman to make the most searching inquiries about it, and as soon as he had set foot indoors he said :—

"I wan't to know what became of the note that was sent here yesterday from Netherwood. I never got it, and I know it came. It was sent by half-witted Tim, and he never makes a mistake about an errand. Somebody must have taken it from him before he got here. I mean, before he reached this house—for none of you would have neglected to give it to me. I *must* find out how it was."

He spoke with such unwonted and startling vehemence, that the Marquis, who had stayed behind to admire the moonlight view over the Chase, felt his curiosity aroused, and walked into the hall. He found the old butler in a state of extreme excitement, affirming solemnly that what had happened had never been known to happen before at Freville Chase, and that he would never rest until he had discovered the perpetrator of such an unheard of enormity. Hubert, seeing him approach, seized a candle in one hand and Everard's arm with the other ; but the Marquis had heard enough to remind him of the note left in his pocket. He stood aside for a few moments in doubt, the nobler part of his nature prompting him to own the simple truth that he had forgotten the note, the lower part shrinking from the unpleasant confession. A complex feeling, that he did not

care to analyse, decided the point, and the struggle ended with the opportunity.

He turned away, avoiding Everard's eyes as he said "Good-night," and went upstairs.

"I believe *he* got hold of it," said Hubert, following him with his eyes. "I am sure he did: I could see it in his face. It never struck me before, and I can't imagine now what his object could be; but I am sure he did it. Could he have taken it to give you, and forgotten it, and then felt ashamed of saying so? I have a great mind to ask him, and I will."

"After all, it matters not now who had it," answered Everard, opening the door that led to the chapel. "The mischief is done."

CHAPTER XI.



NOTWITHSTANDING Hubert's very plain statement about the facilities for hearing Mass every morning at Freville Chase, if the will were strong enough, the Marquis did not put in an appearance. Hubert was in the chapel before the bell had ceased ringing, and worked away vigorously at his prayers. On their way back, Everard stopped him in the long passage and said :—

"You musn't ask him about it. The mischief is done, and it would be a breach of hospitality to ask such a question."

"Certainly," answered Hubert. "I saw it at once last night, when you gave me to understand you didn't wish me to do so. But he had the letter, for all that."

They then went to breakfast, and soon afterwards a fly drove up to the door: whereupon the Marquis rose to prepare for his departure. During his absence, Hubert said :—

"Well, then—in November—but I wish you would come and see us at Beynham. You would get on very well with my uncle. You ought to come."

"I am of no use anywhere just now," answered Everard. "However, I will try to go, because you will be there. I shall miss you as I never missed any one before. But I must say the rest on the way to the station: I shall drive you there. You had better get ready, for the dogcart will be at the door in a few minutes. Moncalvo will be late, if he doesn't mind."

"I shall wait till he is off the premises, if I miss every train by it;" said Hubert, leaving the room. As he left, the Marquis reappeared, made a graceful valedictory speech, and jumped into the fly, which drove away, followed soon after by the dogcart.

Anne looked out of an upper window after the fly, and remarked emphatically:—

"You may depend of it as it was him. I always said he ought to be took up. Why, look here. There's nobody nowhere about as wouldn't do anything in the world for Mr. Everard, and knowing where that note come from, they would have been ever so much more partic'lar about giving of it. I said he'd do something. But there! what would you expect? He knows very well as his doings were heard of about here, and I make no doubt he thought that note would convict him, and that was why he took and throwed it away."

The dogcart and the fly separated on the road, being bound for different stations. When the latter had gone a little distance along the other road, and was crawling up a hill, the Marquis Moncalvo asked the driver how far out of the way it would be to go round by Chase End. The flyman, after some consideration, replied that it would be about a mile and a half, or rather more, whereupon the Marquis said:—

"I want to see a man named Wilcox, who lives in the village. Drive there, if you please. There is another train at one o'clock which will do as well for me."

"And for me too," thought the flyman; "but what can he have to do with Chase End."

He took the by-road to the right, turned again several times in what appeared to be opposite directions, and finally

pulled up at the entrance of the village, which was just outside the east end of the Chase.

"I say, missus," said the flyman, addressing an old woman: "the gentleman wants to see Wilcox. I suppose it's him as keeps the shop. There's no other, is there?"

"In course not," answered the old woman, and the fly moved on till it stopped at the village shop. The Marquis, on being told that the object of his search dwelt there, walked in and asked if Wilcox was at home. A tall bony woman, of severe aspect, replied that he was not, but that she was his wife; whereat the Marquis, inly rejoicing that she was not his, said pleasantly:—

"Is not Charlotte Wilcox your daughter?"

"No, sir. She's of the first family," replied the woman with an emphasis that betokened scant sympathy for the children of the late Mrs. Wilcox.

"Ah! well, but perhaps you can tell me where she is."

"No, sir, I can't; which I haven't seen nor heard of her these six months, and more."

"That is unfortunate. She was lady's maid to an aunt of mine, who died last year, and I wish to arrange about giving her a pension. I am particularly anxious to do so, because I think she said that she would not take any other place; and, indeed, she would find it difficult to do so, as she has latterly been subject to monomania"—

"Please, sir, what is that?" asked the bony woman. "She used to be a bit fanciful and"—

"That was what I meant," he said. "She was liable to strange fancies, and much more so latterly. In fact"—

"I suppose she's got a little wrong in her head, sir," suggested the stepmother. "Well, I'm sure it's very kind, it is, to think of the poor creature. I have often wondered what would have become of her if she was thrown upon us, with three on our hands, and people as used to come here going by rail and haggling about at the shops in Ledchester, and a lot of 'em running up debts and going off somewheres by the railroad and never pays at all."

"I understand you perfectly," he said. "Railroads and other changes have been the cause of great losses to many people in villages and even in small towns. I feel for you very much; and that is another reason why I am so anxious to settle this business before I leave England. Do you

think that you could find any means of learning where she is?

"Well, sir, I am sure you are very kind. I will do the best I can about it; but I really don't know how I am to get a chance."

"I think that you will in time. She will have spent her money after awhile, and then she will naturally return to her native place."

"Maybe so. Well, sir, it's very kind of you, I'm sure, to take so much trouble about her."

He pulled out an envelope and a postage stamp from a sort of pocket-book, and asking for a pen, wrote his own address on it. "If you do hear of her," he said, "will you have the kindness to write to me? If you put your letter into this envelope" (here he put on the stamp), "it will be forwarded to me if I should not be at home. Thank you. Good morning. I am very glad to have seen you."

A sovereign slid imperceptibly from his hand into her's, and in another moment he was off again. The incident caused some local disputation for awhile, divers old women being of Anne's opinion that he ought to be took up, whilst the woman at the shop declared that it was all "a pack of rubbish, which there never was a kinder or civiller spoken gentleman nowhere."

In the meanwhile Hubert had begun his journey towards Beynham by the other line, and Everard, instead of returning home, was taking the nearest road to Netherwood. He arrived there soon after twelve o'clock and looked about for Elfrida. She was reading in the same old schoolroom where he had found Ida ten days before.

"You here so early?" she said. "I am very glad you have come."

"I couldn't wait a moment after I had seen Hubert off," said Everard. "Have you made out what became of the note?"

"Yes. The Marquis Moncalvo took it."

"Moncalvo! It's just what Hubert said and maintained. But how did he get it, and why? what is the meaning of it?"

"All I know is this:—Tim took the note, met a gentleman in the courtyard, 'a foreigneering sort of gentleman,' he said, and asked him where he could find you to give you the note. The gentleman (who could be no other than the

Marquis Moncalvo) said that he was going to walk with you "——

"So he was, and missed me"——

"And that he would give you the note. He took it, and didn't give it to you."

"God forgive him, if he had any bad intention : he could have done me no worse injury."

"I am not supposing that he did it on purpose. I can't endure the man ; but I don't accuse him of that, simply because he would have had no motive for it, at least as far as one can see."

"Nor I ; and yet, when I enquired about it last night in his presence, which would have reminded him, if he had forgotten it, he said nothing, but went off to bed."

"Because he had not the manliness to tell you he had forgotten to give it. He had no motive for keeping back the note, so far as we know ; but he might have a motive some day for doing something else, and I do hope most earnestly that we may hear no more of him for a long while."

"You and Hubert and Mrs. Roland all say the same about him. I don't know what to think. Could he make mischief between your mother and myself, if he were to meet them in Italy ? It seems very like a rash judgment to suppose such a thing without any apparent reason for thinking so ; but when suspicion is once set going, a man circumstanced as I am hardly knows when to stop. And yet what possible object could he have in doing such a thing ? What could he gain by it."

"He could gain nothing by it, of course, but he might delude himself into imagining that he could. However, he doesn't know where to find them, because he asked me yesterday evening, and I told him without any scruple that I didn't know—which was as true an answer as he had any right to, having no business to ask the question, for I really don't know whether they go at first to Baveno, or not."

Everard remained silent so long that at last she said, "There is something more on your mind. What is it ?"

"I was thinking," said he, "how blind I have been about you. I thought I had known you well all your life, and since last Monday I have discovered that I knew less than nothing. I thought that your character had not even begun to develop, and I find it developed far beyond that of other

girls older than yourself. I thought that your mind had not yet got beyond learning by heart, and I find you thinking for me, seeing what I had not seen, showing that you have powers of which I was not in the least aware, and proving that you have learned already to use them."

"My dear Everard," she replied, "a woman learns very early to see a little way, in what concerns those she cares for; and as this concerns Ida so very much, and you too, who have always been like the kindest of brothers to me, it would be very odd if I had not seen something. I only wish I could see further."

"That doesn't explain what puzzled me. What you say about women is perfectly true; but I see a great deal more than that in you now, and I failed to see it before. It is true that I never had an opportunity."

"No; we have never been able to talk of anything more important than lawn-tennis or the violets in the wood-walk. But you judge me too favourably. I feel what has happened very much; and that, I suppose, has sharpened my wits a little for the occasion."

"No—what I see in you is far more than a woman's natural quickness of perception guided by strong feeling. There is more in you, a great deal, than you have any idea of; and you had better know it, that you may make the most of the powers God has bestowed on you. But you have cultivated yourself somehow, I can't make out how. What have you done?"

"Nothing, except that I tried to think. I have been, in a manner, obliged to think for myself as well as I could, because I have had no one to talk to unreservedly—not even to Ida quite, on account of religion. It made her reserved, and my mother—wished it to be so, and I did in a way, though I was very sorry for it too. You see, when religion has to be shut out, one must be particular about what one says"—

"And you feel like a person exploring a house, when every other door is locked. The position is always more or less embarrassing, and, in your case, most painful; but so it is, and as a Catholic, I take care habitually to remember the fact: for that sort of lock may easily be hampered, if one tries a wrong key, and after all the door must be opened from the inside."

"How from the inside?"

"We had better not get upon the subject."

"Why not?"

"We are neither of us in a position to do so prudently, I think; and it would be incautious too, on my part, for it might be said that I have taken advantage of your mother's absence. Now I don't care for what people might say, if I could be of any use to you; but as I should do no good, and possibly some harm, disposed as you are, we had better leave it alone."

"How wonderfully clever of you to see that, for I never told you of my own feelings. And how wise you are in everything"——

"About the note, for instance, which, by your own showing, ought to have brought out all that was in me."

"I was speaking of women"——

"That distinction will not hold good. If strong feeling sharpens perception in what concerns its object, it must do so in men, when they feel strongly, as well as in women."

"I am not capable of arguing with you; but I know that if you had not been stunned and bewildered for a time, as you were, by all you had heard and had to endure yesterday evening, I should not have the immensely high opinion of you that I have. I am not going to be persuaded out of what I said about your wisdom. Who but yourself would have refused to speak of religion for the reason you gave?"

"Any one of common sense."

"I should have thought—and therefore I ought not to have asked the question—I should have thought, that being so devout a Catholic as you are, you would naturally have tried to push me on."

"What is the use of pushing a stone up hill? It will only roll back, or stick half-way."

Elfrida laughed, and said:—

"That is just it. I should never in all my life have thought of putting it so, and it came as naturally from you as if you couldn't help saying it. But you always say the right thing at the right time, in the right place. You have made me laugh when, God knows, I am not in a mood for laughing."

"And I," said Everard, "was going to apologise for putting it in that way."

"Why, it expresses the thing so exactly."

But not as I should have wished to express it, speaking to a lady."

"But it would have been such a pity not to have said it when it was just the right thing."

"Something else would have done as well, or I might have said the same thing differently. It sounded too short, almost blunt; and I do abominate that, more particularly to a lady. Moreover, said baldly as it was, it might have led you to infer that I looked upon your convictions as not worth discussing; which I certainly do not. All honest convictions are, in themselves, worth discussing with the utmost care and attention, and yours especially; for, as I said before, there is more in you, a great deal, than you are aware of, and I am quite sure that your ideas about religion, whatever they may be, are good, so far as you have had light to see by. But for the reasons I have already given, it is not expedient to discuss them. If it ever should be expedient, why then—the case would be different. Good-bye. I must be going. Thank you for all your kindness."

"My dear Everard, you make me feel ashamed of myself. What have I done?"

"Everything that could be done, and more than everything no one can do."

"If you *will* have it so, you will make it seem so, whatever I say. But why need you go so soon?"

"Because, though we have been as brother and sister all your life, your mother has never allowed me to come here and talk to you, and it would not look well if I were seen to have done it the day after she left home. I came because I had no other means of knowing what had happened to the note; but I have stayed too long. Good-bye."

"You are always right"——

"About the note?"

"Don't be so tiresome. Wait one moment. Can't you stay for luncheon? My father is in."

"No. It would be awkward for him, after what has happened."

"There you are, right again; but I *must* see you while they are gone."

"Of course, only not in this way. Good-bye again, and thank you again for"—

"I will not hear that any more—but wait one moment. I have one more thing to say, that I ought to have said before; and I must say it, indeed I must. Don't say anything about the note when you write to Ida; for my mother sees her letters, and if she were to hear about it in that way—you understand me."

"Too well," thought Everard. "I was not meant to know the change of plans, and Ida was not meant to know, and Elfrida found it out for her."

"But what am I to do?" he said. "I can't and won't leave Ida to think that I had the note and didn't come. There is a limit to endurance—I will not do that."

"Tell her that you would have come if you had known they were going on Wednesday, and leave her to make out the rest," said Elfrida.

"It required a woman to think of that," he said. "I will do it. But how do I know what she may be told?"

"Told—Oh! no. My mother, you know, never would, never could"—

"I wish I could feel secure about anything to do with her," he thought, as he hurried downstairs.

He found Sir Richard, talked to him for a few minutes about some local matters, and drove back to Freville Chase.

When the door had closed upon him, Sir Richard drew a deep breath and said :—

"That is as it should be. A sensible fellow, a sensible fellow. Sees things in the right light evidently, and knows that everything will soon come all right. Everything would do right enough, if people wouldn't make such a row."

But this optimistic view was not shared by the sensible fellow, nor did he see things in the right light, as defined by Sir Richard. That "everything would do right enough if people wouldn't make such a row," he might have admitted in a general sense, always supposing "people" to mean Lady Dytchley; but that everything would soon come right, was what he neither knew nor expected. "How long?"—was the question that racked his brain, made his heart weary, oppressed his spirit.

On his way home he had little leisure for thinking. The old coachman, who was in the dogcart, had been told of a lady's horse, and had much to say on the subject. The details were lengthened out till he fell in with the curate of the parish about half-way, and took him as far as the carriage entrance to the Chase, when he wished him good-bye, and turning in at the gate, at once forgot everything but the one unanswerable question. The curate, who had recently come into the parish, went his way, remarking to himself that he had never met a man with so attractive a manner. "He individualises one so," thought he, "and makes one feel at home with oneself as well as with him. I have never seen anything like it. There is something so solid about him too, something so remarkable in his countenance and in his voice and in his way of speaking. I can't make it out."

The curate summed up his cogitations as follows :—

That Everard was what he was, "either by nature or through some mysterious influence of the most wonderfully organised system," &c., &c.

But no such influence was apparent either in Sir Richard Dytchley or the red-whiskered man ; and they were two, whilst Everard was one : therefore religion had nothing to do with making Everard what he was. The worthy and intelligent young man came to this conclusion in perfectly good faith, believing that he had exhausted the subject. Had he asked himself whether the "Mysterious influence" had the same nature to work upon in each, and whether the three had corresponded with it equally well, he would have seen cause to conclude differently ; but the idea did not strike him. He was satisfied with his conclusion, and calling at a cottage, thought of other things.

By that time Everard had reached home, and written a letter about the horse for Ida. While he was directing it, Mrs. Roland, who had followed him gradually, knocked at the door of his room in the tower.

"What can Moncalvo have done now?" he thought, as he recognised her personality in the respectful but decided tone of the knock.

"Mr. Everard," said she, opening the door wide, placing herself before it, and holding it in that position, "I hope you are coming down to luncheon, after all the distance you

have been this morning and all the—. It's past two."

"Very well," he said. "I had forgotten it."

"I knew you had, sir," said Mrs. Roland; "and that was why I came up. You must take more care of yourself altogether, you must indeed."

"I assure you that I do take care of myself"—

"Well, sir, I hope you do: but you don't look like it just now."

"I didn't sleep well last night."

"And not likely to do so, when you were in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament till past four this morning."

"And how did you know it?" said Everard, trying to look cheerful. "That accounts for the figure that I thought I saw in the shadow of the organ gallery. You must have been up there, losing your night's rest, to see whether I was behaving properly."

"To see how long you were going to stay," said Mrs. Roland. "I knew something was the matter, by your inquiring about the note from Netherwood, and by your going into the chapel at that time of night. And there *is* something the matter, Mr. Everard: I know there is."

"There is. The marriage is put off, because the doctor has told Lady Dytchley to go abroad."

"The doctor? he ought to be sent to the treadmill for telling *her* that."

"Well, he has done so, and—they started yesterday morning; and, as you know, the note that said they were going to do so never reached me. So I heard the news when I went there yesterday to dinner."

"It couldn't have been anybody but that Marquis"

"It was, but, I am convinced, not on purpose. He took the note from Tim, missed finding me, and then, no doubt, forgot all about it."

"And couldn't remember it last night, when everybody was talking of it before him," added Mrs. Roland.

"It would have been a disagreeable thing to tell," said Everard, "and the mischief couldn't be undone."

"*You* would have told it fast enough before you could speak plain."

"I should hope so, brought up as I was."

"You are made of different stuff from him, Mr. Everard," said she; "but the luncheon is getting cold."

"I am ready," he said, taking up his letter. "You see I am going under obedience, for I really don't want it."

The luncheon was duly eaten, without appetite and without disgust. Everard left the dining-room, returned to the tower, and walking about his room, the favourite sitting-room which had always been associated with his day-dreams of Ida, began to reason with himself.

"Why do I feel this so extremely?" he thought, "What is the matter with me? Why can't I wait now with as much comparative patience as I did before? Because I expected to wait then, but not now, and because this trial is Ida's, as well as mine. I have been grossly ill-treated by Lady Dytechley in every way, and the less one thinks of Sir Richard's conduct throughout, the better for charity; but all that is nothing in itself. The snub was public, and people will pity me; and to be pitied, in such a case, is anything but a dignified position in the eyes of the world, unless one resents it, which is out of the question. *Transeat*. I don't care what they say or think. What weighs me down is, that Ida is abroad—at the mercy of a woman whose power of self-deception is so great that she is practically unscrupulous. Yet after all, what can she do? Remain longer abroad: that is all she can do. But there is a limit to that. I have her own written promise that the marriage shall be directly after their return; and, if worst comes to worst, why then we must act for ourselves. Yes, but in the meantime I know not what trials and petty annoyances Ida may be exposed to; and here I shall be ignorant of what is going on, and helplessly entangled in the flimsy network, like a bumblebee in a cobweb. It is useless trying to reason myself out of the fact. My position is horrible at present, and I can't bear it long. I *must* assure myself that Ida knows why I never came, in answer to her note; and if I hear nothing about it from her, owing to her letters being seen, I must go after them, come what may. It is too much to bear passively. Will can rule actions, words, and voluntary thoughts; and that is the extent of what I can do with it now, in managing myself."

He opened three or four books, pushed them back into their shelves, and hurrying downstairs, crossed the court-

yard to a door beyond the chapel, which was the entrance to the priest's house.

Father Merivale saw him from a window of his sitting-room and opened the door. Everard walked into the room and said :—

"I have come to ask you a strange question, one that probably you were never asked before, nor will be asked again ; but you will not be able to give me an answer till you have heard why I ask it. I want to know whether I am in my right senses or not, and the reason why"—

"I can answer that question straight off, whatever may follow," said Father Merivale decidedly. "I never knew a man with a healthier mind than yours, nor a more vigorous body. '*Mens sana in corpore sano*,' would be an incomplete definition of you, but it would be most distinctly true as far as it goes. What makes you ask the question?"

"Well, I ought to be ashamed at having to ask it"—

"No not at all. I know you well enough to be sure that you would not have expressed yourself as you did without a good motive and a good reason. What is it that troubles you?"

"A trouble more serious than it appears. Lady Dytechley has put off the marriage, to go abroad by the advice (at least so she says) of the doctor, and insisted on taking Ida ; and when I dined at Netherwood by her wish, to see Ida before she went, I found they had gone some hours before. Ida sent me a note on Tuesday afternoon, to tell me they would start on Wednesday : it was given to Moncalvo, who forgot to give it, and so I lost the opportunity of seeing her. But that is not all. Lady Dytechley threatens to lengthen the delay if I follow them, and is quite capable of remaining abroad an indefinite time, if I do ; whilst, if I don't, I shall leave Ida to her tender mercies, which are the worse because she deceives herself to the extent of being unscrupulous without knowing it. That is my position, and I find it unbearable. It has got the better of my will. Self-control is nowhere in the struggle."

"My dear Everard," said Father Merivale, "do you suppose that our Blessed Lord, who wept at the death of Lazarus, sweated blood over the sins of mankind, and died broken-hearted on the cross to save the world, expects you not to suffer—requires you to be master of your feelings in

such a trial as this ? It is terribly hard to bear while it lasts, and the more so because the evil is out of sight, which makes it seem worse than it is ; but you are doing your best to bear it, and you must not be discouraged if it seems to get the better of you at times. It is not really doing so, and will not : I am sure of that. Your will is right and firm, and by frequenting the Sacraments, as you do, you take the best means of keeping it so. Commit your troubles to Almighty God, and He will give you strength to do what He requires from you. I don't wonder at your being maddened (so to speak) when you think of the position in which your dear betrothed wife is likely to be placed for a time. I should wonder if you were not ; and in fact you would have to be some one else first, some one very cold and uninteresting, some one for whom I certainly could not have the great regard that I have for you. But don't forget your distinctions, you who are always so particular and correct in making them. When one talks of a man being maddened, one doesn't mean that there is anything wrong in his head : one means that the intensity of his emotion has excited him to an abnormal degree. In that sense it is true that you have been maddened by what has occurred, for your feelings have been roused to an extreme pitch ; but your mind is just what it was—one of the healthiest I have ever had to deal with."

"I see it now," said Everard. "I should never have dreamt of asking such a silly question at any other time, or of so confusing things"—

"I know you wouldn't ; but don't imagine that there is anything extraordinary in your asking it. When the heart suffers the mind is disturbed, and the disturbance, if extreme, often feels like a disease. The same thing happened once to me, physically. I had palpitations from indigestion, and I fancied there was something organically wrong, till the doctor showed me how it was. The analogy is close enough, I think. Analogies between mental and physical conditions are sometimes useful."

"And your case corresponds exactly with mine," said Everard, rising to go. "In both the cause was external, and in both it seemed to be where it was not. But I see that you are busy."

"Only with those tiresome figures for the school-inspector."

Don't let that interfere: I can do them to-night or to-morrow morning."

"No. I won't trespass on your kindness, at the cost of leaving you in arrear with all those figures and dots; but I hope to see you at dinner at half-past seven. Do come, if you can: it will be an act of charity."

"I will make a point of it. But I must ask you to give me a quarter of an hour's law. In the meanwhile what are you going to do? You must try to keep clear of introspection and speculative thoughts just at present. When you have had a letter, and written one in return, you will be in a position to see your difficulties in a different light. At present you can't, and I should be disappointed in you if you could. You had better turn your mind on something that will lay hold of it."

"I knew that I must, last night, and I prayed before the Blessed Sacrament."

"I don't advise you to do so now. You are accidentally in too excited and scrupulous a state. It would not be prudent. Read something stiff, intellectual and cold—Aristotle's Physics, for instance you have it in Greek in the tower—anything, I don't care what, so long as it fixes the attention and leaves the feelings alone."

"I will," said Everard, leaving the room. "I shall see you, then, at dinner."

"Nothing but death or a sick call will keep me away. In the meanwhile be assured your sorrow is mine; that I shall offer the Holy Sacrifice for your intention to-morrow, and as often as I can, and make a memento for you when I can't."

Everard pressed his hand without speaking, and hurried away to his room in the tower, where, by an extreme effort of will, he forced his attention on the stiffest book he could readily find."

"He can do it, and he will," thought Father Merivale, "and it is the only thing for him; but he will have a hard struggle with himself to do it."

And he had a hard struggle, a struggle that nearly exhausted the strength of mind and body. When he met Father Merivale at a quarter to eight he was like a man who had passed through the crisis of a fever, passive and weary.

"I have done it," he said, "and it accomplished what

you intended : it took me in a manner out of myself for the time being."

"Yes ; it was the only thing to be done then," said Father Merivale, "but it must not be repeated : it takes too much out of you. Your feelings are so tremendously strong, and your will so indomitable, that it is dangerous to bring them into collision. The will gains the victory, but at a cost that alarms me—and I am not easily alarmed. I wish you would walk with me to-morrow, after breakfast, to three or four places that I have to call at, and extend the walk indefinitely. Take sandwiches and a flask with you, so that we can stay out all day. I have no engagement for to-morrow, except one that will keep, and I can walk any distance. It is bad for you to be alone just now. You want some one at hand to answer your thoughts. You must think out your troubles aloud, turn them loose upon me, leave nothing inside that has anything to do with them. When the heart is sick we see spectres, and want some one to show us that the ghost is only a bush in the moonlight."

At this moment dinner was announced.

"Thank you for this and all your other acts of kindness," said Everard. "I shall be most grateful for the opportunity, and if you can only show that the spectre is a bush !—But I am afraid you will find it otherwise."

"Please, Father, may I speak a word to you?" said Mrs. Roland, as they entered the dining-room.

Father Merivale turned at the sound, and saw her standing within the portière from which Anne had peeped at the Marquis.

"I don't like the looks of Mr. Everard, Father," said she.

"Nor I," said he ; "but I hope that in a day or two"——

"There's a pack of them—her Ladyship, who ought to know better, and Sir Richard, who does know better, and has behaved shamefully all along"——

"And kep' away from his dooties for ten years," said Anne, advancing suddenly round a corner—"I beg your pardon, sir, but I couldn't help speaking—kep' away from his dooties for ten years while her Ladyship was a-robbing the young ladies of the faith ; and then that there Marquis, as took and stole Miss Ida's letter from a half-witted fellow

that brought it, besides creeping about the place dressed as somebody else, and murdering the baby"—

"For shame!" interrupted Mrs. Roland. "He's bad enough, but he didn't murder the baby."

"There's plenty as says he did," said Anne, "and he ought to have been took up. Ain't I right, Father?"

"Well," said Father Merivale, smiling in spite of his anxiety, "you see it would be rather awkward if the police could take us up on hearsay. With so many gossiping people about, we should none of us be quite safe."

"Thank you, sir," said Anne, and making a low curtsy, she retired, greatly relieved by having disburdened her mind to Father Merivale, and remarking to herself as she went, "Well, he didn't say as he oughtn't to be took up, and I'm sure he thinks he ought; only he's so good, he don't like to say it."

"It's all true, sir, about Sir Richard and her Ladyship," said Mrs. Roland, "and a great deal more besides. They're killing Mr. Everard, and will, if they're allowed to go on, for he's not the sort to be played these tricks with. Something ought to be done to bring them up short, or there's no saying what her Ladyship may be up to, for she never could bear Mr. Everard—he's too good and straightforward for her. Surely, Father, when the young lady has been promised to him all her life, and is of age, mayn't she have a will of her own about it? Her father wants it to be—only he'll never stand by anything or anybody—and her Ladyship never made any objection, and the wedding day was fixed and all. Her Ladyship will keep on putting off and putting off, if nothing is done about it, and Sir Richard will go on shilly-shallying, and hiding himself whenever she's up to some fresh game; and there it will be, if something is not done."

"Have you any idea why she is acting in this way," said Father Merivale, "when the engagement has been made so long a one, and she has never objected to it?"

"I can't tell, sir, at all, unless she has some one else in her head, with a great deal of money; but then, Miss Ida wouldn't have anybody but Mr. Everard, and her Ladyship would never find such a one as he is, not if she searched all the world through. She can't have the sense that she was born with, not to see that, let alone *who* he is and the family, and Freville Chase—there isn't such another place

anywhere. But, Father, can't anything be done at once?"

"No. Lady Dytechley has gone abroad, on the plea of ill health, and has promised to return as soon as possible and have the wedding directly after her return. That is how the matter stands, and he would put himself in the wrong if he were to make any move in the meantime. But I am keeping him waiting for dinner."

"Thank you, sir, and I hope you'll be able to do something with him, for I can see the change in him, and he's not one to give way to himself—he never was from a child."

"I know he is not. You may rest assured that I will do everything I can. You see, the misfortune was, that by not getting the note, he missed seeing Miss Dytechley before she went; and what he feels so much is, that as she sent it by a very trustworthy man, she must wonder why he didn't come. When he has written and explained, the load will be off his mind."

"I am afraid, sir, it wasn't meant that he should know they were going a day sooner; and he mightn't like to mention it, for I know her Ladyship reads all the letters. But, to be sure, he *might* say that he would have ridden over if he could have known how it was"——

"That bit of natural diplomacy is worth all that I have said and thought about the matter," thought Father Merivale, as he hastened back to the dining-room.

About the same time that evening Lady Dytechley who, owing to the dentist's engagements or some other cause unexplained, had not left London on Wednesday, was stepping on board the Folkestone boat. Lady Oxborough, too, was there, notwithstanding her appointment, accompanied by her eldest son and two of her daughters. How it came to pass that their departures were simultaneous from Folkestone and from London, though Lady Oxborough, as we were told, had been obliged to leave town on Wednesday and Lady Dytechley obliged to wait till Thursday, is not known. They said nothing about it during their journey from London, nor did they now on board the packet. Perhaps Lady Dytechley, having a great regard for her friend, and desiring to return as soon as possible for the wedding (see her two notes to Everard) had taken the appointment in too strict a sense, and discovered her error on arriving in

London ; but as she said nothing about it, we have no right to affirm positively that such was the case.

The night being warm and clear, and the sea smooth as a lake, she and Lady Oxborough seated themselves in a convenient place not far from the man at the wheel, whom no one must talk to. The rest of the party dispersed themselves a little way off, wherever they could find room, but Ida, to avoid conversation, rose from her seat and walked about the deck. Had she overheard the conversation between her mother and Lady Oxborough, or, at least, the following part of it, she would have heard something that it concerned her to know ; but, as their heads were approximated and their voices low, she did not.

The nautical sounds that give a foretaste of impending horrors to the sea-sick while a vessel is getting away from her moorings, made the first part of their dialogue inaudible, but when they were out of the harbour and the vessel was cleaving her way steadily through the pond-like sea, without noise or motion, anyone walking by at a slow pace and with interest to listen, might have heard from Lady Dytchley's lips the following fragment of an explanatory reply :—

“——and, you see, when the time drew near, she began to feel what a dreadful step she was taking. But then there was that foolish engagement in the way—a silly sort of sentimental fancy as it was, to answer for a baby and bind her to it, like a godfather and godmother in baptism ; and so she tried *not* to think, and thought she was bound to go on with it, religion and all. And then he came to see her when I was out.”

Lady Oxborough made a gesture of protest against concrete Popery as exemplified by Everard, but did not commit herself to a verbal expression of her feelings. Lady Dytchley, encouraged by the gesture, thus continued to open her grief :—

“Yes ! when I was out—but it's just like them—and when he knew too that her father never wanted to interfere with her religion. And he worked upon her so—you know how cunning they are, and how they are taught by the priests to make Romanism look quite different from what it is—that I could see that she was losing her health and spirits. So I determined to bring her with me abroad, instead of Elfrida—I couldn't take both, on account of their father

being left alone. I daresay I shall be abused for it all round, and accused of ill-treating him, and of breaking my word too, if the thing is broken off; but I really couldn't see her sacrificed in that way without giving her an opportunity of escape."

"And you were perfectly right," said Lady Oxborough, drawing up her waterproof cloak to a level with her ears; "but I find it getting chilly. I think I must go down into the cabin. Well, I think you were bound to act as you did. It is not fair to any girl (so beautiful as she is too) to let her be dragged into a marriage in that way; and *if* she is really doubtful about it, and has been influenced by his presence—*if* she has."

Here Lady Oxborough rose from her seat and began to move.

"She *has*. That is just it," said Lady Dytechley, walking after her and speaking into the top of the waterproof cloak, lest Ida, who was not far off, should overhear her. "She *has*. She has been drawn into it and kept up to it. Any one could see how it was preying upon her. That was why I brought her away; and I told him, before I left, that I considered them disengaged."

"Did you? That was a strong measure. What did he say?"

"Nothing at all."

Lady Oxborough gave a side glance towards her son, who was talking to Ida, and said:—

"Well, then, if she is tired of it, and he too, the thing may be said to be over"——

"And never was anything really, on her part," affirmed Lady Dytechley, who had grown bolder in her statements by degrees, as success, real or supposed, increased her demands on her imagination. "I have been thought very hard, and very unfeeling, and very foolish, and very unjust, and very flighty, and I don't know what besides, for acting as I have done; but I know that I have done right."

"And every one will say so. We are all of us misunderstood for a while, at sometime or other about something," said Lady Oxborough, descending into the cabin.

Her misjudged friend was about to follow, when a shadow crossed the light of the setting sun, and a melodious but melancholy voice, not unknown and not familiar, said:—

"How do you do, Lady Dytchley? 'This is an unexpected pleasure for me. I thought you were in Paris."

It was the Marquis Moncalvo, who, in consequence of the 10.50 train being late, had lost no time by his visit to Chase End, and was safe on board before Lady Dytchley's luggage left the station.

"I am very glad to have met you," said she; and her gladness grew, as she rapidly reflected on the advantage of having a second man during the early part of the journey, to avert Ida's attention from the oneness of the other. "She might be set against him at first," thought that prudent and misjudged lady, "for he shows his feelings a little too plainly, poor fellow, and this will just make it right."

"And besides the pleasure of seeing you," she said, "this gives me the opportunity of apologising for my apparent rudeness in leaving home when I had the pleasure of expecting you at dinner. The fact is, I was obliged to be a few hours in London, and Lady Oxborough was to have left town yesterday—which I only knew very late—so that I really had no choice. It was most provoking, for, as it turned out, I might have stayed."

"Sir Richard told me that you had been called away suddenly," said the Marquis, "and I regretted the *contretemps* on your account as well as on my own; for it must have been very fatiguing to be hurried from home on so long a journey, especially as you were in delicate health."

"Yes, it tired me very much. I should have been knocked up altogether, if I had not had four-and-twenty hour's rest in London. Did you leave Freville Chase this morning?"

"Yes, at ten o'clock; and Hubert Freville went to Beynham at the same time. Everard is quite alone, with no one to speak to except Father Merivale."

"Oh! as long as there is a priest," said she, looking downwards and folding her cloak about her, as if the remark were to herself.

The Marquis make a vague gesture of assent, and said nothing. Ida, hearing Everard's name, had approached by degrees. Lady Dytchley noticed the movement, and said audibly, "How was he? in good spirits?"

"Very good," answered the Marquis.

"I am glad to hear that he takes his disappointment so

philosophically," said she, in a tone of astonishment. "But I suppose he felt it when he came to Netherwood and found us gone?"

"I did not observe any difference; but I think that Englishmen sometimes conceal their feelings, and can (so to speak) regulate them," said the Marquis.

Lady Dytechley shook her head, kept emphatic silence for a few seconds and changed the conversation. Ida drew back, glided away behind the funnel, and went forward among groups of people who knew her not. Lady Dytechley saw her go and thinking that a little quiet reflection on what she had heard would be good for her, looked the other way.

Ida was of course not aware of her mother's opinion, nor did she suspect such a view of the case; but hers differed from it widely. She passed through a small crowd of British and foreign men, who smoked wooden pipes or penny cigars according to their nationality, and stood at last where she could look down upon the now dark waters through which the packet was cutting its way. She looked down at that dark water and the sparkles of light dancing over its surface as it rolled away on either side, but heeded it not. Moncalvo's words had laid a burden on her heart that she could neither throw off nor acknowledge. Had she not heard that Everard was in very good spirits a few hours after she had been hurried away without seeing him? Had she not heard it accidentally from an eye-witness whom she had no reason to disbelieve? Was it not confirmed by the fact that, although he was at home when her note was sent, he did not come to see her? On the other hand she believed in Everard, and did not much believe in any one else personally known, except Elfrida. At the thought of what Moncalvo had said, the hot blood mounted into her face, and she simply hated him for having said it, whether innocently or not; but the words rang in her ears, and the recollection of the unanswered note sent a chill through her heart, whilst every mile of the journey seemed as if it took her further and further into doubt and desolation. She remained there, looking at the dark water without noticing it, till the packet arrived at Boulogne.

While she was following her mother into the hotel and snubbing every one else who approached her, Everard,

having accompanied Father Merivale home, was walking out of the courtyard into the Chase, trying, without any hope of success, to rouse himself from a state of depression so immense that it appeared to have no end. But he was not aware that Lady Dytechley, at the Hotel des Bains, was informing Lady Oxborough of his good spirits and exciting herself gradually, by the sound of the words, to have a theoretical belief in what they represented.

The air was balmy and fresh, the sky clear, the stars large and brilliant. He drew a deep breath and said to himself, "This ought to clear away cobwebs from the brain, and would, if they were there. They are not. I should only deceive myself, if I thought so." But the air was physically reviving, and he strolled some distance down the carriage road. As he was walking back, he happened to notice a light in or against a window in the tower. The moon had now risen, and, from where he was, might possibly seem to be shining against the glass; but it was scarcely high enough yet to do so, and the light was too red.

"It can't be on fire," he thought, quickening his pace on a run, and keeping his eyes on the red light: it can't be, unless Moncalvo went there at night, as Mrs. Roland said he did, and dropped a match—people are so careless. I wish I had never seen him: his name comes across me like a shadow at every turn. But what *is* this light? It seems too steady for fire, I think; yet who can be up there? It is—yes, it is the room below the hiding-hole."

He ran on till he was a few yards from the tower, when he stood still and looked at the window carefully.

"There is nothing on fire," he said; "but there is the light, and there it ought not to be. I must go at once and see what it means. It is hardly possible that anything should be on fire; and if it is, there will be time to call people up, and if—I don't know what—I must be there alone."

By this time he was in the hall. He strode past the old butler, who wondered much at his rapid entrance, ran upstairs to his bedroom for the lamp, and hurried to the tower. When he opened the door he sniffed the air critically.

"There is no smell of fire," he said, and then he went on to the panelled room behind the further staircase. Here he stopped and listened. There was a distinct

sound, as of hurried and muffled footsteps in the room.

"Some thieves have got in somehow, and mean to rob the house," he thought, as he set down the lamp on the stairs, "but I don't mean them to do it. I had better have been armed." He stood for a moment erect and motionless, realising the rashness of what he was about to do, and an intense light came into his eyes. Then, opening the door softly he walked in, prepared to equalise the odds, as far as possible, by attacking the invaders before they had recovered from their surprise. But no thieves were there, nor any traces of them, except the light in the room, which came from a rushlight on a table.

"They must be somewhere," thought he, "and they can't know the hiding-hole. But why is this light left here?"

He looked round the room and was still more puzzled. The bed was made, a brush and comb lay on the dressing-table, and there was a small leather bag in a corner. Who could the self-invited occupant of the room be? "Moncalvo aut Diabolus," he thought. "Am I to believe that he came here in the middle of the night, or that the room is haunted, as somebody has set about. I see how the ghost has been made; for my unknown friend evidently makes himself at home, and has lodged here some time."

He looked round the room again carefully, and then at the dim, steady flame of the rushlight. A change came over his countenance. The light had died away from his eyes, and the excessive depression which, for a few moments had been taken off by the thought of a hand-to-hand encounter against unknown odds, possessed him again completely.

"But I must see this out," he said to himself at length. "I will search the hiding-hole first—but there can't be any one there—and then the rest of the tower."

He pushed back an invisible spring in one of the panels on the left, which opened wide enough for any one to go through. The panel was covered on the other side with thick planks of oak, to prevent discovery by sound. When it was shut there was just room for a big man to stand. A nearly perpendicular staircase went straight up for some distance, parallel with the wall of the room. Up this he went in total darkness, till it turned at right angles and ended in a landing place, with a wall beyond and a large

recess on the left, where apples had been stored in times of persecution, to suggest a use for the staircase, in the event of its being discovered. The bottom of the recess was a little below the level of the landing place, and the top about two feet above. He touched a spring at the bottom of it, when part of the floor became detached from the rest of the landing, and lifting up that part, like the lid of a box, he disclosed a wooden receptacle, in size and shape like a saw-pit, ventilated sufficiently to keep a human being alive, and lighted by a small grated window that was not seen from the outside, owing to the thickness of the wall.

When he opened the lid he heard a cry of terror within, and looking down into the hiding-hole, which was about six feet deep, with some rudely cut steps to descend by, saw a woman crouched up in a corner of it. He at once jumped in, and on seeing her face nearer by the light of the moon which shone through the grated window, thought that he had seen her before.

"Oh ! don't," she said. "Don't look so. Indeed, it is not my fault—it is his. Don't send me away from here : I shall die if you do. I will tell you all, Mr. Everard. Do hear me, and you will see how it is ; but don't drive me away. There is nowhere else where I am safe. Mrs. Roland will tell you, but I implored her not to say anything till *he* was out of the way."

"Don't be afraid," said Everard. "You are quite safe. But surely I remember you long ago."

"You do, sir, when you were a child. I should have known you anywhere, though it is so long ago, and I have had so much trouble since."

"You must be Charlotte Wilcox."

"I am that unfortunate creature ; but for pity's sake, Mr. Everard, don't let any one know. Mine is such an extraordinary case. You would never imagine what I have gone through."

"Either most people are out of their senses," thought Everard, "and she in particular, or I never had any."

"Mr. Everard, you don't seem sure about it," said she, giving away to another paroxysm of fear. "Oh ! do give me shelter here, only for a short time. If you only knew"——

"I will, indeed. Don't be afraid of anything. But why

are you here in this uncomfortable place? You would be perfectly safe in the room below."

"It was only because I heard footsteps"——

"Well, now you know whose they were; so come down and let me see you are better lodged before I go."

"Oh! don't go yet, sir. Do let me tell you first why I am trespassing on your kindness in this way, and do let me tell it now at once; for indeed I would have told you before, and only begged Mrs. Roland not to say anything to you till he was gone."

"'He' again!" thought Everard. "What is coming next? Moncalvo, of course—*Siamo sempre da capo*."

"I mean, gone away out of the country," said she.

"Who?"

"That dreadful Marquis Moncalvo. Oh! Mr. Everard, you have no idea what he is. He tried to make out that I was mad long ago, only his aunt prevented him all the while I was in her service; but she died, and then I was obliged to come to England, with no one to protect me in a foreign country. The old Countess took me at first because I was unprotected, and I am sure she knew there was something wrong about the child's death, and when she died, I was so grieved that I could think of nothing else, and he got somebody to say I was out of my mind, and I found out that he intended to shut me up in a madhouse. Then I came to England, for fear of him—for I knew he would swear anything against me—and I hid about till I was nearly starved and had spent all my money. Then I remembered hearing of the hiding-hole when I lived here many years ago, and I begged Mrs. Roland to have pity on me, and"——

"But what object could he have in doing all this?" asked Everard.

"It was because I knew too much, though I couldn't prove it so as to take the law of him. I know he made away with the dear child, and I wasn't going to let him think I didn't and say afterwards that I had said nothing about it at the time, in case I should be able to get proof of it some day; and so I told him that I knew he had done it, and he couldn't bear the sight of me ever after that."

"I don't wonder at that," said Everard. "But he has no power to get you into a lunatic asylum. It can't be done in England without two doctors and a magistrate, who must all

of them have an interview with you ; and as there is no magistrate but myself within six miles, you may set your mind at rest about that."

"Oh yes, sir, I know you wouldn't let me be wronged ; but he is up to anything. He wouldn't mind about getting me away by force, if he couldn't do it any other way : and then, what could I do among strangers, with him swearing against me and bringing forward what I accused him of, to show I was mad. I can't prove my words, and the magistrate and the doctors and them would think of course that it showed I was mad."

"Such things have been done, I know," said Everard ; "but the person who does it must be a relation, or at least show some better right to interfere than he could. The case would be too suspicious. Any magistrate would want to know where you came from, who your relations were, and who the people were that brought you. It would be too dangerous a game for any one to play who has a character to lose."

"Yes, sir, it would ; but there's no bounds to what he would do. He would think nothing about swearing away my life, he wouldn't indeed."

"I may as well give in with a good grace," thought Everard. "One may as well try to move a mountain as an *idée fixe*."

"And he is *so* deep, there's no being even with him," she added, after pausing for a moment in expectation of some word or sign that might be taken for assent. "He wouldn't stick at anything, to get me out of the way ; and it's no wonder I am afraid to be seen out of doors, with him going about and pouncing down, nobody could tell when or where."

"To be sure. Well, then, make yourself as comfortable as you can in the room below, and when I hear that he is out of England, I will find some less lonely place for you. We will see about that in a few days."

Charlotte Wilcox thanked him repeatedly, climbed the steps of the hiding-hole after him, and returned into the rush-lighted room. Everard then said a few kind words, wished her good-night, and went his way. As he passed through the tower he said to himself :—"I have the English doctor's certificate that the child died naturally—a well-known

English physician of high character. So much for that. It was Moncalvo's interest that the child should die, and he did die. Charlotte Wilcox told him that he was a murderer, and he showed that he didn't like it—no wonder, and since she left Italy, thinking he wanted to put her into a lunatic asylum, she has brooded over it till it has become a monomania. No wonder Moncalvo didn't like it. It cannot be pleasant to have a person going about saying that one has murdered a baby. But I wish she had chosen some other hiding-place."

"Just as he was passing the door of his sitting-room Mrs. Roland opened the door of the tower, and said:—

"It is very late, sir, I know; but I wanted to tell you something, and I have had no chance to do so all day."

"I think I know what you mean," he said. "I have seen her—Charlotte Wilcox, and heard it all. I went there because I saw a light and thought something might be on fire."

"I wanted to speak about it," said she, "because it looks so very improper of me to take her in like that, and say nothing to you about it. But I assure you I was afraid she would have drowned herself, or something of that kind, if I hadn't promised her to say nothing to anybody until the Marquis went away."

"My dear old faithful friend," said Everard emphatically, "you must always do what you think best. You are sure to be right, and I shall always think you are right. It would have been unlike yourself and against the old customs of this house, if you had not given shelter to Charlotte Wilcox. I would not have refused it to anyone in distress, much less to a woman born in the parish, and an old servant in the family."

"You are always like that, Mr. Everard; but it's an awkward business. What is to be done with her? She would take a place, but is hardly fitted for one now, and she won't go home, because she can't get on with her father's second wife."

"Well, I must provide for her somewhere. I can't let her go to shift for herself as she is. Did she tell you a long story about the Marquis Moncalvo?"

"Yes, sir, she keeps on saying, like some of the old

women at Chase End, that he did murder your baby brother, and that he wants to put her into an asylum for saying so; but she owns that she has got no proof. Of course he didn't do that, but I am sure there's something wrong about him. He ought to have told you about that note when it was spoken of. It wasn't straightforward, and I didn't like many other little things about him."

"I can't make him out," said Everard, opening the door of the tower; "but you must be tired. It is past twelve. Good-night."

"He tries to speak cheerfully and make the best of things, but he looks so that it breaks my heart to see him," thought Mrs. Roland. "Lady Dytchley ought to be ashamed of herself, playing the fool, without any feeling for Miss Ida or anything. A great strong thing like her, to talk about being ordered abroad for her health! It's all very well to say the time is nothing, and will soon be over, but that isn't it. It's the putting it off when everything was ready—having her taken away from him almost at the altar, as you may say. She don't care enough about Sir Richard (and who could?) to know what it is, but she knows she's doing wrong. Oh, dear! I hope he'll hear from Miss Ida soon, and then he'll be able to get on better."

He certainly was far from doing so then. The scene in the tower had passed out of his mind, or remained there but as an unnoticed impression. He only thought of the lost note and all its possible consequences, whilst Ida, without any abatement of confidence in him, was crying herself to sleep over the report of his good spirits, and Lady Dytchley, seeing therein an opening for certain views of her own, was feeling more pleased with him than she had ever felt before.





CHAPTER XII.



WHEN Ovid put forth the opinion that we can laugh at false reports about us, if we are conscious of being innocent—

"Conscia mens recti famæ mendacia risit,"

he might have added, "unless the hearer is one's betrothed wife, from whom one is unavoidably separated by land and sea,"

but then he was not acquainted with Lady Dytchley, and perhaps had never met with any one so skilled in utilising other people's words. Everard was very much acquainted with her, and had, on more occasions than one, seen his own words undergo strange transformations under her care; so that when he began to analyse a little more accurately what it was that he had really dreaded, he found it in that utilising power. This discovery, or rather realisation of what he had felt before without having a clear impression of it, brought him into a state of mind that made Father Merivale despair of any good results from the long walk and his own charitable efforts. They began the walk, however, and continued it till about midday, when Father Merivale, after some hard thinking, proposed suddenly to return and take another and a longer walk instead, the next day.

"I had not thought," he said, "of an important matter that I ought to see to."

Everard turned back mechanically, not caring much what he did, and they walked home at an increased pace, of which he was not aware.

"Can the dog-cart be of any use to you?" said he, when they had returned to Freville Chase, and Father Merivale was about to start again.

"No, thank you," said Father Merivale, "your horse has been worked a great deal lately. "I shall manage very well."

He walked to a farmhouse about a mile distant, borrowed a cart and drove to Netherwood. When he arrived there he found Sir Richard in the stable-yard preparing to mount.

"May I speak to you for a moment?" he said. "I see you are going out, but I will not detain you long."

"I am so glad to see you," said Sir Richard, in a non-natural sense, for he felt a sudden and quite unaccountable misgiving at this unexpected visit. "Why didn't you come to luncheon? We should have been so delighted to see you."

"You are always so hospitable," said Father Merivale, "and I should have had great pleasure in coming sooner; but the fact is that I came for another purpose altogether, for your sake, as well as for that of a most dear friend."

"God bless me! What is coming now?" thought Sir Richard. "It can't be about *him*. It is always a great pleasure to see you," he said nervously, "and I only wish you had come earlier, for I am really obliged to start at once. I am very sorry, and I see you so seldom too; but business: you know"——

While pronouncing the last words he put his foot into the stirrup, mounted with exceeding nimbleness, and with a touch of the spur, made his horse sidle away out of distance for private conversation. "Good-bye, good-bye," he said, "I am so sorry. I wish you had happened to come sooner."

But this manœuvre only removed him from the protecting ear of the groom, and brought him into *a cul de sac*; for in backing to avoid pursuit while saying good-bye so pleasantly, he found himself wedged into a corner of the yard, between the great open gate and the wall, with Father Merivale in front, and as he was not prepared to ride over a priest, *suadente diabolo*, he was obliged to listen.

"I will not detain you," said Father Merivale, "but I can't go without saying what I came to say. I should be acting wrongly by you if I did. I have no right to spare myself a disagreeable office, at the risk of helping by omission

to entail on you serious responsibilities, and perhaps bitter remorse."

Sir Richard winced perceptibly, and made his horse fidget from side to side, ready to take sudden advantage of an opening ; but Father Merivale kept his post, and said in continuation :—

"If anything really goes wrong about Everard Freville's marriage, you, who approved and encouraged that marriage, will be responsible for the consequences. He is exceedingly strong in mind and body, but he will not be able to stand that, I am certain. He can't be bent, but he may be broken, and if you allow him to be hard pressed in that point, he will."

"Really I have acted for the best about it, and done what I could. I think it is I who am hard pressed. Of course I have the greatest respect for your office, you know, but, really, it's going a little far, and "—

"I am not here as a priest. I am not speaking as a priest. I have nothing to do with you, in any way, as a priest. And, if I had, I never should dream of speaking to you as a priest about your private affairs. You know very well that no priest would do so. I speak as one man to another. I speak as a Christian and a neighbour, I speak because I cannot in conscience be silent, I speak in your own interest. You have been Everard Freville's guardian ; you stand towards him *in loco parentis* ; you have allowed him to be brought into the present painful and false position, which has already broken him down more than any one who has not seen him within the last two days would think possible, and you have the responsibility of any and every evil that may arise out of it. I am not in any way supposing that it will, but knowing Everard as well as I do, knowing all the circumstances of the case, and not knowing what might come out of so sudden and unprecedented a postponement, on the day fixed for signing the settlements and within three weeks of the wedding day, it was my duty to tell you what you were evidently not aware of and could not know to its full extent. Having done so"—

"Thank you very much," interrupted Sir Richard. "It was very kind of you to mention it." "You see as to what has happened"—

"What has happened is no business of mine ; and as I

wish to mind my own business, I decline entering upon that subject. I should not have broken off a very important engagement to drive eighteen miles in a jolting cart, if I had not been impelled to do so by a motive that I should not have been justified in resisting. As I said before, I am not supposing anything more than what has happened and is happening in consequence ; but you must see that I had good reasons for apprehension, and could have had no assurance that this apprehension might not prove a reality. Feeling as I do the peculiarly delicate position of a priest in such a case as this, I had to do battle with myself for some time before I could make up my mind to come here and speak as I have spoken. I felt that it was my duty towards you, as the person most responsible for the result ; but we are all poor weak creatures, and I must confess that I should have shrunk from coming here on that plea. I will be frank with you and confess my weakness. Nothing but my immense regard for Everard Freville would have made me come on such a business to this house."

Sir Richard fervently wished that his regard had been less. "But it's coming to an end," he thought ; and his head made frequent gestures of general assent.

"Perhaps you don't know Everard as well as I do," said Father Merivale. "I have had peculiarly good opportunities of doing so. He is the noblest specimen of a Catholic layman and an Englishman that I have ever known, and I could not see, or fancy that I saw, the remotest chance of such a life being unjustly sacrificed, without warning the person who would be responsible for it. I have warned you, and in case of possible difficulty, your own conscience must do the rest. Good-morning, Sir Richard, I am sorry to have detained you."

He drew back, and Sir Richard, escaping from his corner, rode off, waving his hand in mute acknowledgment.

"I might as well have spoken to the stable door," thought Father Merivale, as he climbed into the cart ; "but he may remember it, if another sharp fit of bronchitis, or some other stimulant of the conscience, happens to make him think."

The cart started with a jerk that nearly shook the seat out of its place, and after rumbling and jolting over the cross roads for the space of an hour and twenty-five minutes, brought him at four o'clock to the farmhouse. He had been walking,

driving and unsuccessfully talking, more than six hours, and then had to walk nearly a mile home, with an accumulated amount of work before him, including arrears of office, the books for the school-inspector and the report of a possible sick call. "I have enough to do to-day, of all others," he thought; "but I must see Everard first."

He found him in the Chase, holding in his hand three letters brought to Lyneham by the second post and from Lyneham by the old coachman, who had gone there to inquire about the carriage horses. One of the letters was from Ida.

"Are you satisfied with it?" said Father Merivale. "But I see that you are."

"I am," said Everard.

"*Deo Gratias!* Then I will be off, for I have lots to do."

"*Deo Gratias?*" he repeated mentally as he walked away. "If she had written sooner, I might have spared myself one of the most disagreeable employments that ever fell to my lot. But then I should have missed an opportunity of grappling with an extreme repugnance to do what was right. I never disliked anything so much in my life, either in prospect or in practice. I am very thankful, on my own account, for having been enabled to do it; and besides, it may be of some use in some way, some day or other, to Sir Richard. Perhaps he never gave any one a chance of telling him so many home-truths. Anyhow it has done me good, and the taste of the pill is gone."

Whilst Father Merivale was settling down to his arrears of work Everard was reading Ida's letter again. As no one but himself and the writer has seen the inside of that precious missive, the character of its contents must be taken for granted. It satisfied him, and he was by no means in an optimistic state of mind when it arrived. The letter had been written in London and posted too late to be received in the morning. It may be supposed that nothing was said about the lost note; but the omission would not disturb him, seeing that he was aware of reasons for not mentioning it.

The other letter was from Lady Dytchley. He read that, too, a second time, and was satisfied with what it said, which was this:—

"My dear Everard,—What will you think of me when you

*receive this after my telling you I was leaving town yesterday ? I am full of business with dentists and shops for things I had forgotten in my hurry and doctors besides, having been quite knocked up with the fatigue of starting a day sooner, and the worry of being obliged to disappoint you of seeing Ida here, and after all, we were obliged to stay till now, I having in my flurry misunderstood Lady Oxborough's note about the day she would have to be in Paris. I am better now, and I fully expect and believe that the fresh sea-air in crossing on such a lovely evening as it seems likely to be will begin to set me up quite, and the change of air and scene will, I feel sure, take away the remains of my attack very soon. I quite think that I shall be able to come back by the middle of October, and then the wedding can be in a few days, for everything can be arranged beforehand. In great haste.—Yours affectionately,
“Charlotte Dytchley.”*

It seems difficult at first sight to reconcile these comfortable assurances with the statements made to Lady Oxborough on board the steam packet and the confidential thoughts imparted to her inner self, from time to time, during that part of the journey ; but sea-air, after the reactionary consequences of an intermittent tantrum, has a tendency to encourage hopefulness, and the particular kind of hope thus aroused may be determined one way or another by accidental circumstances that would have no force in Paris. There seems to be no other way of explaining the discrepancy.

Everard, not being aware of what had passed on board the Folkestone boat, was simply satisfied with what was written ; and when he had read Ida's letter for the third time, he opened one from Hubert.

Hubert's letter began with expressions of regret at leaving Freville Chase, and after some strong abuse of the Marquis Moncalvo, drew to a conclusion thus :—

“My uncle desires me to say that he has often wished to see you, and never could manage to do it since you were a boy. He wants you very much to come and stay here as long as you can, and is saying so repeatedly while I am trying to write. So do come, whether you can or not. For every sort of reason I want you here ; and to give you no excuse for not coming, I have told my uncle that you were very busy, and would

probably not be able to come on short notice. So come on the 31st, if there is any difficulty about coming sooner, and you will be ready for the partridges, which promise well in these parts. The post is gone ; so you will not get this till Saturday, unless some faithful retainer goes into Lyneham and brings it out. I have not begun to forget what you said to me on the most serious of all possible subjects, in answer to the rubbish that I talked about. I said my prayers over it in the train as hard as I could, but nothing particular has come of it yet. Pazienza ! as the Italians generally say when they are much excited. I suppose that, by trying hard and wishing to do right one finds it at last, if it is to be found. . . .

Everard decided to go to Beynham on the 31st, read Ida's letter for the fourth time, and retiring to his room in the tower, wrote answers to the three letters. First he wrote to Hubert, saying that he would be at Beynham on the 31st, then to Lady Dytchley, thanking her for her letter and distinctly-made promise to hasten the marriage by returning as soon as possible. This he expressed with the greatest civility, but in the plainest terms, as a formal protest against any loose interpretation of her letter. The distinctness of her promise was shown by her own words, brought in skilfully with due and undue acknowledgements ; but want of confidence could not be inferred, nor did he feel any then. It may seem odd that he was satisfied with this third written promise, and not with the two others. The ostensible reason was this :—The first letter might have been written to keep him quiet till she was out of the way, the second to ensure his not following them before they had left Paris and gone, he knew not whither ; but when she was about to start for Folkestone, feeling morally certain that he was at Freville Chase, what possible motive could she have to commit herself in writing more distinctly than before, unless she meant what she wrote ? That was the reason that appeared conclusive to him, and probably would to any one ; but the sudden reaction inclined him to be more fully satisfied than he would otherwise have been. He wrote a long letter to Ida, skilfully contriving to say as much as Elfrida's warning would allow to prudence, and then he fell to day-dreaming.

About this time the landlady of the White Hart, at Lyneham, was aroused from contemplation over her

accounts by the unexpected and unwelcome arrival of the woman of the "middling countenance." That unpleasant visitor presented herself in an abrupt and bold manner. The landlady saw the apparition through the glass door of the room where she sat, and her dress became very tight at the vision.

"Please'm, she won't go," said the waiter, in anticipation of a refusal. "She's a queer customer, she is, and walks about as if the whole place belonged to her. Hadn't I better fetch the police?"

"No," said the landlady, drawing a deep breath, to loosen the accidental tightness of her dress. "She is half mad, poor creature. Show her into No. 1 sitting room."

The woman was shown in, and the landlady followed, rousing herself to resistance as she went.

"Well! what do you want?" said she, standing square before the intruder and jingling a large bunch of keys.

"I am come for twenty pounds," replied the woman; and her countenance looked more middling than before.

"Then you *must* want it, for I haven't the money to give you, and wouldn't give it if I had," said the landlady in a bluff but uncomfortable voice.

"Well, my dear old friend! H'm! ha! I am truly desolated, but—*che volete, in somma?* I cannot be without bread."

"Bread! you who have been living like a fighting-cock."

"I have been fighting with my miseries, but I do not sing like a cock. It is you who do like that. Your big gown shakes while you talk so grand, like the wings of an old cock when he sings very big to another."

"Do have done with that rubbish! I say that you have been living better than me, and spending money when I was working hard to save it."

"What does that import? We are in the same boat—I can say so much English as that. I must have my money, or"——

"Well! What are you going to threaten now? It doesn't signify to me; for if you bother me any more, I shall sell off—there are plenty who will jump at taking the business—and go away to America."

"Oh! If they jump so to have it, you must have more than twenty pounds."

"I haven't, I tell you. Can't you understand plain words? How can I have it, with you sponging upon me in this way."

"Sponging upon you? Without doubt you are drunk with your own bad beer and mixed cognac."

"You are enough to provoke a saint, with your nonsense—playing the innocent and pretending to misunderstand me. Now, look here. I haven't got the money, and can't get it. Do you understand that?"

"I understand that you tell me that, but I am not so beast. What for have you that grand cameriere, and the man who carries the baggage on his shoulder, and the man who stands doing nothing at the door, if you have not the money to pay them?"

"You are a downright fool. Don't I want money to pay those fellows? How can I keep them and you too?"

"Ah! Well! Hm! I will go to the old"——

"You great fool! what will you get by that? Do you suppose you will get money out of *him*? I advise you not to try that game. You'll get yourself into trouble, if you do, I can tell you."

"And you too. It imports to you no less."

"Not a bit of it. What *you* say will be worth nothing by itself."

"Hm! Will it not? You will be made to say; for I can find another who shall say something—you know who. And then what will you do—eh? eh? eh?"

"I don't care for your threats now: so there! And I haven't the money to give. How was it you didn't find him that must have given it to you? I told you where to find him."

"You told me to go where I could *not* find him."

"It was your fault, if you didn't. And what have you done with the ten-pound note I gave you last week, when I hadn't another in the house?"

"I have some of it."

"I should think so, indeed."

"But I must eat."

"Go and get an honest living. Go into service again. You *would* spend your money when you had it. Work for your living, like a respectable woman, instead of cadging about in this shameful way."

The woman of the middling countenance made no answer, except a repetition of her former statement—"I must have twenty pounds." The landlady became very red in the face, and breathed hard.

"I haven't got it;" she said; "but I'll tell you what I will do. I will give it you at Christmas, if you will promise not to show your face here again for two years."

"No, no, my dear," said her persistent tormentor. "I must have it now—twenty pounds, lire sterline."

The landlady's dress nearly burst, by reason of the excessive demands on its expanding power; but for the space of a few seconds no articulate sound was given forth by its occupant.

"I can't; and that's all about it," she said at last. "Do as you please, you nasty, idle, deceiving, revengeful, ungrateful creature!"

While she was pouring out this torrent of adjectives the middling countenance underwent a rapid change. It did not become less middling, but it brightened. An idea, not quite new, but put to flight by the strife of tongues, had struck her forcibly during the interval of silence, and she expressed it in a business-like way.

"Now, my dear, I love you very much"—here the landlady flounced and muttered—so I will do the possible for you. What can we do without the money? I must have some, that is certain; But I will give myself the pain to find one other, who *must* give me money if I can find him; and I know where I can find him. Now, well! Give me twenty pounds, that I may have to eat while I am finding him."

"Pish! Does he live in California, that you are to spend twenty pounds in eating while you are after him?"

"E un modo di dire. You know well what I mean. I must have clothes and I must pay the tickets when I travel in the train. Then let me speak: it shall be good for you. I go to the other man. He would not love it if I—you know what, and you know who he is. Shall I say his name?"

"Any one you like. I can't tell what's in your head. Go and bother anybody."

"Anybody? I know well who he is, and you know. Do not you remember when we were such very dear friends, eh? eh?"

"Do have done with that blarney, and say what you want to do, straight out. We are *not* friends, and I wish I had never seen your ugly face ; so don't let us have any more of that. What is it you want to do ? You've driven me into a corner ; and I mean to show fight, if you try it on any more. What is this dodge of yours ?"

"What has a dog to do with my travels, and the money I shall get from him when he shall see me ?"

"Mercy upon me ! I wasn't talking about a dog. I meant to say that I wouldn't stand any more of your tricks, and I won't. But go on—go on."

"Now, my dearest friend, do be genteel. I say that I shall go to him, and shall get much money from him ; and then I shall not come to get it from you. You understand that, I think ?"

"Of course I do," said the landlady in a softer tone ; "but how can I believe you ?"

The woman of the middling countenance looked hard at the bunch of keys and replied :—

"You shall see. I have never told you this secret before, because I did not think of it. I shall tell it you now."

"I tell you I don't want to hear any of your secrets."

"But they are your secrets, my dear friend."

"I won't have any more of this. Will you go ?"

"When you shall have given me twenty pounds."

"You thick-headed donkey ! I haven't got twenty pounds to give."

"You shall find them when you shall know that they are the last sterling pounds that you shall give to me."

"Well, if they were, why, of course"—

"Give them to me, then, to pay the travels, and the hotels, and all this, that I may find him. Shall I tell you who he is ?"

"Bother the man ! I don't care who you mean. Finish what you've got to say."

"I shall find him, because I know where he lives. And he must give me much money, and then I shall never come to you no more."

"Well, if you can do that—why, of course"—

"I can do it. I know where he lives, and he must pay me much money ; but the travels, you know, cost the

money. You must give me twenty pounds now, and I shall never ask money from you no more."

The landlady paused and reflected.

"If you wait a bit," said she, "I shall be able to give it you; but I really haven't it at present."

"What for are those keys, if not to open the box where is the money?"

"They don't open the money-box; and if they did, there is nothing in it but some silver."

"Then give me the silver"——

"Yes, and leave myself without a penny, when I am near run dry already."

"Well! Hm! then I must go and tell, and they will make you tell"——

"What, cut your own throat to spite me"——

"It shall be so. I am desperate. Give me twenty pounds, and I shall not trouble you no more. If not you shall hear too much. I go now."

The landlady placed her portly figure before the door, and considered the case with all her might; but no practical solution presented itself, for twenty pounds were not in her possession at that moment.

"You could get the money," remarked the unpleasant woman, moving nearer to the door.

"Yes, and ruin my credit."

"That is not my affair. Give me the twenty pounds, and I shall never come to you no more."

The landlady was driven to desperation.

"What *am* I to do," she thought, "to get rid of this beast of a woman? I could get rid of her for ever by giving her twenty pounds—I see that—and I haven't it, and can't get it without ruining my credit in a small town like this, where everybody knows everybody's business. There is *one* person, that queer old aunt of mine, who—why, there she is!"

There was a confused murmur of two voices in amicable dispute, then a smothered knock, a decisive push against the door; and old Susan, of the Four Ways, walked into the room, her head cannoning against the middling countenance, as it gave a last warning at the door.

"I ask your pardon, ma'am," said Susan. "I were in such a hurry. I don't often see her—she's my niece, ma'am—

because I live a good bit away ; for an old woman like me to walk."

"Yes, it's a long time since I saw her," said the landlady, addressing the Italian. "I have a word to say to her about some business. Don't go till I come back."

The mysterious visitor assented, and old Susan followed her niece into the little room with the glass door.

"She's a queer sort of customer, that woman you saw," said the latter, when the glass door had been safely shut.

"I knowed she were," answered Susan, opening her eyes and looking forth into space. "Whatever could make you let such a sort as that into the place?"

"Well, you see, she has known better days, and I remember her then, a long while ago ; and I don't like to give her the cold shoulder now, when she's in distress."

"That's right, in course, but lor' ! she's got such a bad look about her !"

"She's a deal better than she looks. Trouble, you know—trouble makes people look different from what they *have* been."

"It do. I mind how Tom Simcox, as lived groom at Hazeley, and got married to a drab of a girl from Rathole Street—she wasn't no comfort to him nohow—and he took to drinking and lost his place, and the last time I saw him he were a-cadging about with Methodist tracts, and getting drunk when he could get the chance."

"Just so. She didn't get drunk, but she has seen trouble ; and there it is. I *have* helped her once or twice ; and this is the last time, for she has the chance to get on well, if she can just turn the corner and pay what she has to pay. She has come to me to help her over the stile, and I would with pleasure, because I know it would set her right once for all ; but I have had such a lot to pay out lately, with doing up the house which had got dingy, and one thing and another, and the railroad taking the custom away more and more, year after year, and making new stables this year, for they had got too bad to go on with : and so I haven't it to give her."

"That's a bad job, if she's what you take her to be," said Susan.

"She's just what I said, and she'll go to ruin, unless I help her ; and I can't help her."

"I don't understand them foreigners," answered Susan ; "but in course it's bad to see a respectable woman, as you've knowed before, a-going to rack and ruin for want of a bit of help. But lor' ! some on 'em is that deceiving, as you can't believe a word of it all, and goes and does no good with it, but takes and throws away what you've give 'em, and gets worse off than they was before. I mind lending Widow Perks five pounds—it's eight years come Michaelmas—to pay what she owed at the shop and get a sewing machine, as she said she'd make a living off. But, bless you ! she never made nothing except it was fine clothes for her daughter to strut about in o' Sundays, and I never got paid, nor never shall."

"That's quite right : it's disheartening work, in general, to help anybody. But I know all about this woman, and I should be sure of what I was doing."

"Well, you had ought to know her best ; but to me she's about the deceivingest-looking woman as ever I set eyes on. I wouldn't trust her with nothing, no farther than I could see her, nor yet so far. But lor' ! Eliza, whatever are you taking on about, all of a sudden ?"

"I can't bear it any longer, aunt," said the landlady, who had lost courage at last and was sobbing in a corner. "I'll sell everything off, and go and hide my head in some place where nobody knows me. I've got to the end of what I can bear. I am broken down by it, and that's the truth."

"But whatever has broke you down like this ?"

"It's that horrid woman there. Years ago she got me mixed up in a transaction of hers"—

"Them long words," remarked Susan, "never means no good. And couldn't you get out of it ?"

"No. She dragged me into it"—

"Well, I wouldn't never be dragged into a transaction : it don't sound right."

"I was deceived about it : but there ! She had got hold of me, and could say I knew about it ; and she threatens to make it known, unless I give her twenty poundsto pay for her journey to where she will be provided for. But what with the extra expenses this year, and having given money to her twice before since Christmas"—

"What ! she's kep' all on a-threatening, has she ?"

"Yes, because she had spent the money and had nothing to live upon ; but now there are those that will provide for her, and all she wants is to be helped on to the place."

"Is she a-going there with four post-horses and a man and a maid, as it's to cost such a lot?"

"It's the distance, you see, aunt. She comes from so far off."

"Where missis went, three years ago, is it? Well, that is a good way, to be sure."

"Yes, and she can't go without the money. And if I don't give it to her, she will get so savage that she will do what she threatens, I know ; for she is as revengeful as she can be, and won't believe I haven't got the money. I can't borrow it from the bank, and have it all over the place, after keeping my credit and enjoying a good name so long. I must give up, and sell the business for what I can get—sell it for an old song, as it always is when you have to sell in a hurry, and go into service again, if any one will have me, with my bad leg that I can't stand on for half an hour together most times. But that's what I must do. It's a hard case to be sold up, as you may say, and ruined, and driven out upon the world when one's past work, and all because I was too easy ; but there it is, and I must do it at once. I shall tell her that I haven't got the money, and she must do her worst ; and then I'll go and see the auctioneer about the sale. Wait a moment till I have been and told the woman."

She walked across the room, and was opening the glass-door, when old Susan stopped further proceedings by saying :—

"Don't do anything of the kind. I've got the money. You must'nt go for to sell up because a nasty beast like her has been a-robbing of you."

"Well, since you are so very kind as to make the offer," said the landlady, "I don't know how to refuse. It *would* be a pity to be ruined in such a way, with this property and the business, and money coming in."

"Which it happens lucky as I've got it with me, what I had kep' a long while going on, and never come into Lyneham to put it in the savings bank till to-day. So here it is. Now you go and get shut of that spiteful creetur. There was another on 'em about 'tother day, and come to

the Four Ways, he did, and wanted to get inside to speak to a woman missis had give shelter to, who had seen better days, leastwise she made believe she had ; but he wanted to rob the house, as I told Muggles the p'liceman. It's a gang of them all together. But you go and give this one what she wants, and see her off the premises."

Her grateful niece needed not a second bidding. She walked with due dignity into No. 1 sitting-room, and said to the woman of the middling countenance :—

"Here is the money. I had to borrow it from a person who has worked hard for it and was going to put it into the savings bank. I shall have to go without winter clothes and many other things to pay it off, and I shan't be able to give you any more ever. If you come again you will get nothing, and I shall set off and go to America. You have told me that this money would take you where you can get what you want, and you have promised me that you will never ask me for any more. Am I to believe you, or not? If there is any doubt about it, I shall not give it to you, and I shall sell up the place at once and go away. Which is it to be?"

"Give me the twenty pounds, my dear, and you shall never see me no more," answered the woman, stretching out all her fingers towards the twenty sovereigns which the landlady held in a brown holland bag. "I go to *him* now, and I shall get money from him, I promise it to you. Shall I say one word to him, and make him give *you* some? You see I do not forget an old friend, when I can do her a service."

At this suggestive offer the landlady was struck speechless with repressed indignation. Her ample throat made a convulsive effort, as if the affront were a potent liquid, and she labouring to swallow it decently. The middling countenance was exclusively directed to the bag ; and her mouth, forming itself by degrees into an angular smile, put the action into words.

"Now, my dear," said the repulsive specimen of self-lowered humanity, "I have promised, and I shall do that what I have said. Give me the money, and I shall go for my affair, and you shall never see this poor face no more, unless you shall wish to see your dear friend. I shall come always, if you shall wish to see me, but not till that time."

"Here they are, then. Where is your purse?"

"Here, here—this little thing shall hold it very well."

A small leather bag was held up and the twenty sovereigns poured into it, after being carefully counted over in both languages. Then came the parting.

"Good-bye, my dear," said the satisfied levier of black mail. "I shall always think of you."

"Good-bye," said the landlady. "This way, if you please, ma'am."

She opened the door and stood outside, pointing with her finger, but, while doing so, found herself suddenly folded in the arms of her persecutor, and kissed violently on both cheeks.

"That will do, now," she gasped out, endeavouring to disengage herself with dignity.

"Now you be off," added Susan, who had appeared on the scene as soon as the door was opened. "We don't want such as you about. You're a pack of you, you and that chap as Muggles ought to have took up, and that tramp as took in missis. You walk off now!"

"Yes; I'm sure we've had enough of you and the lot of you," chimed in the waiter. "Don't you know as all vagrants found in the town will be prosecuted? That's law. You'll have the p'lice after you if you don't mind."

"You might, indeed, if they heard of it," whispered the landlady. "Extorting money is a punishable offence, and you might be sent to prison. I shouldn't have the power to save you."

This cautionary advice rid the much-trying landlady of her troublesome but successful visitor, and Susan was on the point of starting homewards in a baker's cart when Sherborne and De Beaufoy, who had driven into Lyneham to see the hack recommended by the latter some days before, walked into No. 1 sitting-room.

"I don't exactly know why we came in here," said De Beaufoy, walking up to the window and looking out.

"I do, as far as I am concerned," answered Sherborne, "I am fond of the room. I came here when I first went to Bramscote, and I came here when I was going there again, after all my troubles, to end them by the happiest of marriages. I always walk in here. But there is the dog-cart."

He left the room and saw old Susan coming out of the glass-door.

"You here?" he said. "I never saw you so far from the Four Ways before. Let me take you home."

Susan curtseyed, and followed them to the house-door, where the waiter stood in readiness for all demands.

"What's the last news, John?" said De Beaufoy.

"Well, sir," said the waiter, "I don't know of much, only they've been and put off the wedding, and Lady Dytechley and the young lady is gone off to France, or somewhere. They went o' Wednesday morning from Netherwood."

"That's true, sir," said Susan, as she settled herself in the seat behind. "The lawyers was there last Monday, with their writings and all, to finish up; and Sir Richard he took hisself off when they was a-waiting for him to make it right; and the lawyers had to go away, and Squire Freville, and there was an awful rumpus about it; and her Ladyship is going about telling 'em she were that ill she *must* go to foreign parts *immediate*."

"I thought Lady Dytechley would try it on," said De Beaufoy, as soon as the dogcart was in motion. "I saw it in her face, and gathered it from the tone of her talking. She means mischief, means this to be the beginning of the end."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Sherborne. "I don't see how she can carry it out; but she may bring them into a most painful and difficult position, if the poor girl's natural protector is to take himself off whenever she wants his support."

"Dytechley? Oh! you may depend on his acting like a cur about it. 'A plague o' such backing.' But society will pull her up, if she goes too far. It would be too gross a case for people to stand."

"Not if she pleaded religious scruples, and worked them persuasively. '*C'etait plus fort que moi*,' would be admitted, I think."

"No. It would be said that they ought to have been brought forward at first—not years after, as an excuse for making her husband break a solemn promise to a man of such high character as Freville. Society resents a gross breach of faith, as a danger to itself; for people know that, if unnoticed, it becomes a precedent and an example that may bring the like on themselves in some form or other."

"Happily they do, as a rule," said Sherborne, "but not always. The case may be imperfectly known, and I suspect this is. Is it generally known that theirs is a positive engagement, agreed to beforehand by the parents, on both sides, and not a half-understanding between them, tolerated under conditions? I don't quite think it is."

"I do : for I have heard lots of people talk of it, and say what a romantic sort of thing it was for two fathers to make such an agreement. The thing is known well enough, and if there is any attempt at breaking it off, I will refresh people's memories in such a way that she will not find it advantageous. I can, and certainly will, if she does ; but she won't. She might (and no doubt will) try to persuade Miss Dytchley out of it, but that is not to be done. Why, here comes the liberal Catholic himself. I'll make him remember meeting me to-day—*Thou com'st in such a questionable shape, that I will speak to thee.*"

Sir Richard, who was jogging home comfortably from Bramscote, appeared to suspect some evil intent, for he suddenly increased his pace to a smart canter, and waved his hand in token of hurried recognition ; but Sherborne, by an invisible movement of the wrist, made his horse swerve across the narrow road, and pulled him up on his haunches, leaving the captured horseman just sufficient space to keep clear of the ditch.

"I beg your pardon," said he in the most natural manner imaginable. "I don't know what my horse could have been about"——

"Oh, well ! they do sometimes—one can't help these things," answered Sir Richard, remembering but too well how the similar misbehaviour of Everard's horse, on a certain occasion, had caused the collision of two carriages, a fly, a curate, and a man lighting a pipe, whereat the latter swore, and the family coach drove off in haste, with Lady Dytchley and the impending tantrum in it.

"I have been to call at Bramscote," he said, while Sherborne was backing his horse to make way, "and to Hazeley, where I had the pleasure of finding them at home. Mrs. Atherstone was there, which was very pleasant. A wonderful old lady she is."

"She is a wonderful reader of character," said De Beaufoy.

Sir Richard, who had reasons for disliking that sort of literature, began to move onward.

"By the by," said De Beaufoy, jumping out of the dog-cart, going close to Sir Richard, and speaking in a low voice, "when is the wedding to be?"

"Oh! very soon, you know. They will be back soon."

"The sooner the better, for *your* sake. It's a serious thing for you, worse than it seems—a good deal. But perhaps I oughtn't to say so—only I have known you so long."

"Serious for me? Why, what have I to do with?"

"So people say. It's the talk of everybody that you won't have anything to do with what you did yourself. All the waiters and chambermaids and ostlers are talking about it. It's all over Lyneham that you ran away when the settlements were to be signed, and it's even known beyond here. People are commenting on it and drawing conclusions of a most unpleasant kind. I tell you, as an old friend, what I know to be the case. You must do as you please."

"Well, you see, one can't always, as things go. Circumstances are so awkward."

"As to circumstances, we have as much to do with them as any one else has. No circumstances are strong enough to make a man break his word without his own consent."

"But who says I have? Really this is going beyond what"——

"Beyond what most men would take the trouble to do. I know it is, but I am taking the trouble to do it for your good. The thing is very unpleasantly talked about already, and will be much more, if you don't mind; for, after what has occurred, people *will* think that the marriage is being surreptitiously broken off, and unless it soon takes place, they will always think that you wanted to break your solemn promise about it."

"But my dear De Beaufoy," said Sir Richard, fidgeting in his saddle and feeling very hot in both cheeks, "there is no wish to do anything of the kind, and never was—I assure you there is not."

"I am not supposing that there was. I am advising you, as an old friend, not to let it look so. You are in a false position about it now, to use the mildest term; and if any harm should come of it—you understand what I mean—the whole responsibility will lie with you."

"But it's very hard, though," pleaded Sir Richard, "to shove it all on me—it really is."

"Nobody shoves it on you, my good friend. It is you who are trying to shove it off you."

"It's all very well to say that; but it's an infernally awkward position, mine is."

"I know it is; but you made it, and will have to answer, not only for making it, but for whatever may happen in consequence that you have the right, the power and the obligation of preventing—which you most distinctly have in this case. You can't shift your responsibility on another person. You may look away from it, and try to persuade yourself that people are hard upon you; but you will have to answer for it to God at last, when you can no longer shove anything off. I am sure you will think of what I have said, and act upon it, because you must see that I have told you the simple truth for your own best interests in every way. One often fails to see a very simple thing till somebody points it out, and then one wonders why one hadn't seen it. I feel sure that this is the first chance you have had of hearing it put plainly before you as it really is"—

"I wish it were!" muttered Sir Richard, taking advantage of a small space between De Beaufoy and the ditch to make his escape. "Twice in one afternoon!—only Father Merivale was very considerate, I *must* say, and didn't tell me that all the waiters and chambermaids in the county were bawling it out all over the place."

"I could have better spared a better man," remarked De Beaufoy, getting into the dogcart. "It's no matter. Some of it will stick—perhaps as much as he is able to hold."

"Please, Squire," said Susan from the hind seat, "may I be took on to Hazeley. I wants to see Mrs. Atherstone particular."

"By all means, and taken home too," said Sherborne.

Sir Richard trotted on, telling himself at intervals that he had a great mind to go and fish in Norway.

Old Susan sat bolt upright in the dogcart, saying to herself, "Won't missis stare to think of the woman a-coming like that? But I expect she's seen plenty such in foreign parts. It's a gang of 'em—this nasty impudent thing as began hugging and kissing (I'd have took and boxed her ears, if it

had been me) and Jane Davis as come off the door-step, and him as kep' all on a-ringing at the bell. We shouldn't have heard no more of the lot, if Muggles had acted proper."

Mrs. Atherstone was not at home when they arrived, but Susan took possession of her room, waited there till she came into it, and began at once.

"Whatever do you think, 'm, I've heard to-day? It was when I went up to Lyneham, to see my niece, as keeps the White Hart and put the money into the savings bank—only I didn't get it in—all along of her coming cadging with a wicked lie against them as had been so good to her. No doubt but what she's one of the same lot as that Jane Davis and the chap as wanted to rob the house, and would, if it hadn't been for me a-showing him the old blunderbuss. There's a gang of them. And that chap was a-hanging about t'other day to spy for this here woman; for he stopped at the White Hart, and ordered all manner of rubbidge for dinner (the waiter told me) to make believe he'd some business to be there, and then this nasty impudent thing come and"—

"I can't understand a word of all this," interrupted Mrs. Atherstone. "Who on earth is the nasty impudent thing? And what did she do?"

"Got twenty pounds out of my poor niece, 'm, just when she were short because of a lot of things as she'd had to do on the premises, and money given twice before since Christmas—a nasty, good-for-nothing creetur."

"More fool she to give it."

"Well, 'm, you see I wouldn't tell it to nobody else, in course; but that wicked woman as come there had got my poor niece into some kind of trouble as they called a transaction, and she had to be got rid of."

"I hope you didn't pay for it with the money you took to put into the savings' bank," said Mrs. Atherstone.

"Well, you see, 'm, what could I do? The woman said positive she wouldn't never ask again; and if she hadn't been give it, she'd have took and made a blow-up. 'Liza would have had to sell the business and cut off, because she shouldn't be brought to shame by this here beast of a woman as had got her into a transaction. But I shall get my money all right. The business is good at the White Hart, only she'd had such a lot to pay just now."

Mrs. Atherstone remained silent so long that Susan began to feel uncomfortable as to the legality of paying off the woman of the middling countenance. At last she said :—

“My dear old Susan, whatever you do, never let yourself be drawn into paying for a transaction again.”

“No, 'm, I won't,” said Susan, preparing to return home. “I didn't never like them long words.”

Old Susan went home to the Four Ways, and Mrs. Atherstone sat in her chair till it was time to dress for dinner, reflecting on what she had heard.

“This must be some cheating affair,” she thought, “and the fat landlady has been let into it. But why did that man come and hang about the Four Ways?—and why did Jane Davis, the woman I took care of when she was evidently starving, disappear as soon as he appeared, and write me a rigmarole about circumstances? I don't see how this man and Jane Davis can have helped the Italian woman to get the twenty pounds; for they were not at the inn, and the woman got the money by her own threats. But it seems that the man stopped at the White Hart, apparently for no purpose, as he did nothing when he was there except ordering ‘rubbidge’ for his dinner. I can't make anything of it. If the three have anything to do with each other, which I doubt, Jane Davis must have been drawn in, like the landlady, and drained of her money by black mail given to the man. That accounts for her alarm and her flight and the tone of her letter to me.”

This solution did not quite satisfy the acute old lady, but as nothing better had presented itself when the dressing bell rang, she laid the subject aside as one that only concerned the landlady of the White Hart.





CHAPTER XIII.

"Ye Gods! annihilate both time and space,
And make two lovers happy."

—COMUS.



VERARD was satisfied indeed, but not contented; for contentment is satisfaction with what we actually have—*contentus qui continet quod animo satisfaciat*—while he was only satisfied by anticipation and, during the next few days, was made practically aware of the difference between present and future happiness by finding that, in spite of his bright anticipations, the present was painful and unsettled. He read Ida's letter continually, carried it about, thought of it always; but the way of his life had been broken up in front, and he must wait till it was passable. He tried the stiff reading again, but its power to fix his attention had ceased with the necessity. Then he began to skim over light and miscellaneous books, thinking that by their variety they might at least distract his mind; and then he tried hard exercise. Both these attempts failed worse than the first. When stiff reading could not hold his attention, looser thoughts could hardly be expected to do so; and bodily exercise takes us indeed out of the spot we were last in, but not out of ourselves. Finally he went into the chapel and remained there till late at night. There alone he found peace, and there he passed a great part of his time till, ten days afterwards, he set out for Beynham.

Change of scene, like the characters of public men, is overrated and undervalued. The Lady Dytchleys assume it to be a panacea, and Horace's words,

"Calum non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt,"

are sometimes taken too literally ; but, exaggeration apart, change of scene is a great fact, if the fresh place is free from painful associations, and you are neither quite alone nor in the yet more lonely state of feeling yourself distinctly one among many. Beynham was a fresh place, free from associations of any kind, and Everard was not alone there in either sense. The guests were just what Lord De Freville's letter and Hubert's commentary had led him to expect. Their companionship was morally uncongenial and intellectually unsuitable ; but what made it so was the result of habit and example rather than of bad intentions, and after he had been there two days, the tone of their conversation improved, they knew not why. Lord de Freville, who was more impressionable than his friends, felt the improvement, and being more inclined to think than they were, sought the cause, till he found it in the tone of Everard's mind, the strength of his character, and something besides that increased the effect of both. What this something could be, that set the rest going, he knew not though he was continually trying to find out the trick, but it so attracted his attention and roused his curiosity, that he pressed Everard to lengthen the visit.

The mode of life there, whilst the other guests remained, was monotonous, because the pursuit of amusement was unbroken. There were men who thought they could make life available longer by killing the time that measures it ; and, as Lord de Freville gave them all possible means of doing so, day after day rolled on like wavelets on the sands, leaving an impression of sound, motion and repeated endings.

They went their ways, then others came and went, and then there was only Everard. Hubert now thought that he should find an opportunity of having it out with him and settling the question—to be, or not to be ; but Lord de Freville thought the occasion no less opportune for satisfying his own desire of finding out the trick that metamorphosed the table-talk, and as he was both inclined and

accustomed to late hours, he kept them so long in the smoking-room at night, that in the morning there was very little spare time till he was up and active.

This state of things lasted three days. On the fourth morning Everard had two letters by post, one from the Marquis Moncalvo, the other from Sir Richard Dytchley. The latter, being unexpected, and the cause of it doubtful, was opened first. It may be divided into two parts, a narrative and a request. The substance of the narrative was this—Two days before, while shooting, a wounded partridge got up between him and a short-sighted friend. He happened to turn round at the moment, and, as the bird flew low, the shot struck him, inflicting a wound not honourable but exceedingly painful. This unpleasant wound had laid him up in a state of great discomfort, and under the persuasive influence of the shots that were sticking into him like the heads of large pins, enlivening his conscience, provoking his memory, and stimulating his intelligence, he began to see his own conduct about the marriage in a strong if not a new light. Kept awake by pain and fever, and unable to lay the question aside, he said to himself aloud :—

“It was a pity, a great pity. I should like to see Everard. I am afraid I rather got out of his way before—the thing was so awkward—and tell him how soon it will be all right, and so on. Besides, he would be such a comfort to one, when one is laid up like this—he’s got such a lot in him—and poor Elfrida has no one to ride with while I am in this way. I must write him a line to-morrow,” &c., &c., &c.

The letter that he wrote was short, but its meaning could not be mistaken. Everard felt that he must go to Netherwood, and decided to go without delay.

The Marquis Moncalvo’s letter was long and elaborate, containing many gracefully-turned sentences appreciative of Everard and Freville Chase, many incidental anecdotes, and many abstract opinions derived from his experiences in England. He began with an apology for not writing sooner, and then explained what the impediment had been :—

“Though I write from here (Florence),” he said, “I have been obliged to make a much longer journey, with business to do in the intervals. Besides that, I have had an attack of my former illness, which was driven away by the invigorating air

of Freville Chase, but returned in its native place, Rome, where it lives and will live, with more or less vitality, notwithstanding the eucalyptus. It is wonderful that people do not see how ill-suited Rome is to be the capital of Italy. I had the unexpected pleasure of meeting Lady and Miss Dythley on board the steampacket, and travelling in their company as far as Paris. Lady Oxborough asked me if I had seen the ghost in the tower at Freville Chase. I told her that I had not even heard of such a visitor there, but that I must be the ghost, if there is one; which is true. For one night, after I had left you at the door of your bedroom, I felt a great curiosity to know what was on the other side of the great door at the end of the corridor, and as I went in a little way, leaving the door open, the light of my candle and the echo of my footsteps may have been mistaken for something preternatural. She then said that a light had lately been seen in a window of the tower, but I annihilated that ghost by telling her that your private sitting-room is there. She shook her head, declaring that she would not have the ghost-story spoilt, and that there ought to be several ghosts there. 'Not a new one at Freville Chase,' said I—but as the train was then stopping at Amiens we went to luncheon. And now I am going to make an open confession. I ought to have made it before I left your hospitable house, but I was so ashamed of the culpable carelessness of which I am going to tell you, that I deferred doing so till the next morning, and then there was no time. The note from Netherwood was lost through my fault. When I came out to walk with you in the Chase, after our return from Hazeley, I met a man in the courtyard who said that he wanted to give you a note. I told him you were in the Chase, and offered to take it. The man said something about giving it into your own hands, but as he held it out, I thought he intended me to have it, and I took it. Whilst I was looking for you, I put the note into my pocket in order to light a cigar, and after walking about a long time without finding you, returned to the house. You were not in, and I wrote some letters. When I dressed for dinner I had forgotten the note and the whole affair, and I never thought of the note again till I heard you speak of it on Wednesday evening. My first impulse was to tell you the whole story then, but I was so shocked at having inadvertently been the cause of so much mischief, that I really knew not what to say, and so I thought

that I would wait till the morning. But nothing ought to be deferred that can be done promptly. In the morning I did not see you till we met at breakfast (though I might, if I had gone to Mass, as I ought to have done), and then, to say the truth, I was so ashamed of my worse than stupidity, my culpable forgetfulness, that I hesitated to speak of it before young Hubert Freville. Then the fly came to the door, and the opportunity was gone. I cannot find words to express the regret and vexation that I feel about this occurrence. It would have been bad enough at any time, and under the circumstances it is enough to make you hate me as long as you live. You are too good a Catholic to do that, but you might be fairly expected to go so far in that direction as charity will permit. I hope you will do so, for I cannot afford to lose the most valued friendship that I ever had."

The rest of the letter was miscellaneous. Everard read it after breakfast, and left the room, motioning Hubert to follow him. They walked into the shrubbery, and when they were out of sight, Everard said :—

"I must go this morning. I am very sorry for it, but it can't be helped. Read this."

Hubert took Sir Richard's letter, read it, and said :—

"I am very sorry that you have to go, very sorry, for every kind of reason : but the shot was a lucky one. I hope the man missed the bird altogether and sent the whole charge into Sir Richard. The more the better. It will give him just what I want for myself, time to think, and something to drive the right sort of thoughts well in : only I should prefer a less material method."

"You shall have both the one and the other," said Everard, "when you come to Freville Chase, as much leisure as you like, and what little I can do to put in the way of finding out the truth for yourself. But are you quite sure that you realise all the probable and improbable consequences of what you want me to do for you ?"

"Quite. Whatever may happen, I must and will go on with it. I know too much to remain as I am. I don't expect my uncle will make a row about it."

"Nor I, since I have seen so much of him. My impression, from various things he has said, is that he respects the Catholic Church historically, admires it from an æsthetic

point of view, is half-ashamed of the ancestor who apostatised, and would be a Catholic if he had any religious belief at all. He would not, I think, object to your being a Catholic. He might even envy you and say, 'If I could only believe it!' But human nature, without the help of the supernatural, is not to be counted on, and you cannot be sure about it."

"No. I have thought of all that: but it doesn't influence me in the least, one way or the other. I know too much to remain where I am—and there is an end of it. Try to come back here in a week or two, and put me in the way of finding my bearings. Do you think my uncle will ever get beyond the appreciative state? He really is so good and charitable and honest."

"I don't know what to think. He is all you say of him, and more: but it isn't enough to start with. Still I should not be surprised. I half expect that he will; somehow or other, die in the Church."

"So do I. It seems odd that I should feel anxious about it, when before I am not yet sure about myself; but I do. Perhaps I am surer of myself than I can account for. Anyhow, I am sure that if any one can influence him, you will."

"Perhaps, for we have fitted wonderfully well—I don't know why—agreed generally, and agreed to disagree, in a sort of provisional way that always holds out a vague possibility of agreement. He has been extraordinarily kind to me. I have enjoyed a very agreeable and interesting visit, and I have gained a valuable friend. And now I want you to read this other letter. Part of it may give you a better opinion of the writer."

"Moncalvo, of course," answered Hubert. "I shall be surprised if it does."

He read it through carefully, gave it back, and muttered, "Well! what of it?"

"Why, didn't you notice what he says about the note?"

"Very much; and I noticed that he doesn't say what he did with it. He says too much. If he had told you that he had lost it, the story would at least sound natural; but the pocket tells too much and too little. If it was left there, he must have found it the next time he put on the coat. People don't travel about with a coat for every day in the week."

"No; but he had a good many, I think, and he went away two days after. There is no reason to suppose that he wore that coat again in the meanwhile."

"Why didn't he say, then, that he hadn't come across the note, because he hadn't put the coat on? And why didn't he look into the pockets of his coats and his breeches, and every pocket he had, when he heard you making a row about the note?"

"Well, no doubt because he was so annoyed at what he had done, that he forgot everything except what he had forgotten, and only remembered having left it in his pocket afterwards. His not saying what he had done with the note tells in his favour. If he had meant to deceive, he would not have forgotten to explain that."

"Well, no; I never supposed that he forgot the note on purpose, though I should be sorry to go bail for his not doing so, if it suited him. What I mean is, that when he was reminded of the note on Wednesday evening, he was bound to search all his pockets at once and bring it to you, or, if he hadn't self-control enough for that, send it by post. He has confessed the truth at last, simply because he knew that you would find it out; but he keeps the letter. There can't be any excuse for that, and it looks bad. There can't be any good motive for it."

"No; but there needn't be a bad one, for I can see why he"——

"I can only see that he has no business to keep your note. Why don't you write and tell him to send it?"

"I mean to do so, but I feel sure that he destroyed it on Wednesday evening in disgust. If not, he would have sent it in this letter."

"Well! if he did that, he ought to be"——

"You don't make allowance for the pressure of sudden temptation. He was ashamed of what he had done; ashamed to own it; angry with himself, and therefore angry with the thing; and under a sudden impulse he got rid of it. But I must see when the next train goes, and tell your uncle how it is that I am obliged to go."

"There is none that will suit you before half-past twelve," said Hubert; "for you can't possibly be at the station by eleven o'clock. You won't find him now, for he is busy with old Barns the steward. He will be very sorry when he

does know it. I never knew him take to any one as he has to you. He is civil and kind to everybody, but he doesn't care much about any. One of them does as well as another, unless a man is underbred or offensive."

"He is too good for the kind of men he has been thrown among," said Everard, "and he feels that they are uncongenial, but he goes on associating with them from habit and good nature. Celibacy, without a religious vocation or something akin to it, is apt to make a man gravitate into some awkward groove of life and stick there."

"That's it. He *has* gravitated into a groove of life, and there he is, with fine qualities of every kind thrown away—that is, to a great extent. It often vexes me, for he is so good and has so much in him."

"Yes, he has great capabilities that have never been developed. He has strength of character not exerted, good abilities unused, and fine moral qualities lying comparatively idle. All the best of him is *in potentia*, and little or nothing in *actu*. There must be some reason for his being so unfinished, or rather stunted. Had he ever any disappointment—I mean of the kind that crushes?"

"Yes, he had, when he was about my age. He was a younger son then, and there was a hitch about the money, and it was broken off; and there it was, and there it is, and there *he* is—outside the door. I suppose you will be some time at Netherwood. I wish I were you—I mean myself where you are going."

"Is that it?" thought Everard, as he went towards the house to find Lord de Freville. "I hope it will turn out well; but with his inclination to be a Catholic, and hers not to be, the prospect is not clear. She is exactly suited for him in herself; but if she cares about him and knows that he is inclined to be a Catholic, she will make it a point of conscience to go the other way, for fear of acting on human motives about religion. The prospect is not clear at all, and I shall be dragged *nolens volens* into some of the responsibility. I don't mind that, but I should be grieved beyond measure if they were to make a mistake about each other."

He found Lord de Freville looking for him, explained the necessity of going to Netherwood, and promised to return,

if possible, before the wedding. Half an hour afterwards he left Beynham.

"Then it will be in October?" said Hubert, as Everard was taking his place in the train. "After all, you will only have lost six or seven weeks. But you have forgotten to put me off. November will never do."

"Come a little later, then," said Everard. "I will write and let you know. I shall always be glad to"——

But the guard whistled close to his ear, shutting the door of the carriage with a bang, and the sentence was cut in two, like the last words of Don Ferolo Whiskerandos.

The distance between Beynham and Netherwood was under fifty miles; but owing to local necessities and changes from one line to another, the railway mileage was nearly doubled, the trains did not fit into each other, and time, which has been very loosely defined as money, was lost in abundance. It was nearly seven o'clock when Everard arrived at Netherwood in an old yellow chariot that did occasional duty as a fly.

He went at once to the patient's room, and found him a good deal the worse for his accident. Sir Richard thanked him for coming, and then began to talk about his ailments. Romeo's remark that

"He jests at scars who never felt a wound,"

was the substance of his lamentations; only he expressed the idea in less Shakesperian language.

It's all very well," he said; "but nobody knows what this sort of thing is who hasn't tried it. I'll never ask him to shoot again. It was that fellow with the red whiskers, who went with us to dinner at Bramscote. He was staying there when I asked him over. I mean to write and advise them to get hold of his cartridges and put blank ones instead. Can you imagine a man firing straight at one, like that? Some of the shots have gone in so far that I don't know, I am sure, how they can be got out. I shall lose all the best of the partridge shooting, and I shall be kept from hunting the whole of November. And your wedding too! Fancy not being able to be at that. He ought to have his gun taken from him—only it wasn't his—it was one of mine. I don't believe he ever had one in his hands before. I ought to have seen, by the cut of him, what he was. How is Lord de Freville? I remember him

formerly—and the young one? a very pleasant young fellow he is, too. Well! I am uncommonly glad to see you. It does me good to see your face, and particularly just now, after you have been so bothered about this unlucky foreign tour—confound it! I wish there were no foreign countries for doctors to send people to. It has been very hard upon you, and, upon my word, I did all I could to stop it: only there it was, and I had made a mess of things before, don't you know? and that complicated it because when Ida felt she ought to be a Catholic straight off, and said so, you see it put her mother up, on account of my having let it all go wrong and left it so, and that made her more determined to have her own way about going abroad in the middle: and that's how the thing was. You see, it wasn't altogether illness, and yet it was, too. She was annoyed with the—the thing (you understand) and laid it all on you, for talking to Ida about it. I don't mind telling you, but we had such a row as never was, coming home from Bramscote. I tell you because it's your concern; and I don't see why I should get the credit of it all, when it wasn't my doing. The whole thing began then. It wouldn't have happened at all, if that same red-whiskered fellow (I always forget his name) hadn't insisted on going outside just as we were starting. If he had been there it couldn't have happened, and the thing would have blown over; but, instead of that, he only kept on grinning and thanking me, and sticking where he was. And then the thing began, I am sure I don't know how, all about you talking of religion to Ida—as if you hadn't every right to do it, as I was going to say, only I was snapped up so—and she got into an awful state over it, and Ida spoke up, and there it was—about the worst drive I ever had. Then there was a feverish attack next morning, and no wonder; and the doctor came and said a lot of things that you might take as you fancied, and she took it that way, and one couldn't get her to see it in any other way. Upon my word I was so ashamed of myself and the whole thing, on that black Monday when it all came out, that I couldn't stand it, and I rode about from one till past seven without any luncheon, on a horse with a loose shoe. I don't mean to say that it wasn't my fault at the beginning, for if I had stuck to my duties properly, and all that, the girls wouldn't have been left, as they were, to be educated out of the faith,

and I shouldn't have had that row in the carriage, and the doctor wouldn't have been called upon to talk about going abroad, and the wedding wouldn't have been put off, and Elfrida wouldn't have been left without a chance of getting back into the Church, after being baptized in it. It was all owing to my having grown careless. My wife has lots of good in her, mind that, and has been a very good wife, and a very careful mother ; but, my dear fellow ; mixed marriages are bad things. They make the worst of both. Marriage is a wonderful tie, you know, and if you are not one in religion, the Catholic is apt to lose his landmarks ; and then the other thinks worse of his religion than she did before, and where there are children it's a bad business. Well ! I wanted to say all this, for it weighed on my mind. By the by, Father Merivale drove over here before you went to Beynham, and spoke about it. I didn't much like it at the time, because I was bothered and was afraid of another row like the one in the carriage ; but now that I am laid up here with nothing to do but to think, I see things differently. I wish you would thank him for me. Suppose you ride that way to-morrow with Elfrida. And now, do you know, I can't talk any more at present : I feel quite done up. Come and see me again by and by. Don't say anything now. I know you would say everything that is kind. It will be near dinner time too."

Everard left the room and went to dress for dinner.

"How difficult it is to be charitable practically !" he thought. "I have known him all my life, and I never understood him till to-day. I seem to have mistaken defect for excess, weakness for want of principle. Suffering is a great preacher, but the sufferer will not be influenced by the preaching unless there is something within that responds to it. I have understood Lady Dytechley much better, and judged her, I think, fairly. I suppose it is easier to understand excess than defect—strength than weakness. The print is larger."





CHAPTER XIV.

*"Then let me not let pass
Occasion which now smiles."*

—PARADISE LOST.



POPE, being ugly and spiteful, informs us, on the authority of a lady whom he is addressing in one of his Moral Essays, that—

Most women have no characters at all.

His fair moralist must have followed too exclusively the oracle's advice, *γνώθι σεαυτὸν*, and learned to know herself better than she knew other women; for the statement will not stand examination below the surface. But if she had said that the characters of many women are checked in their growth and never go to their natural depth, she would have told the truth, though it might not have fitted into the metre of the Moral Essays; and certainly Elfrida, up to the day on which the settlements were not signed, was, in some degree, an instance of what the process can effect. Sir Richard's faculty of distinction was as weak as his character, but he spoke with perfect precision when he said that Lady Dytchley was a careful mother. Care, however, may be conveniently divided, for the present purpose, into three classes: intelligent care, troublous care (which, as the old adage tells us, killed the cat) and care that works on wrong principles. Lady Dytchley was careful in the latter sense. The principles that guided her carefulness could hardly be right as a whole, for they contradicted each other. She wished her husband to be a Catholic, and her daughters not to be. She wished very much to influence Elfrida, but,

owing to the necessity of suppressing the contradictions, repressed confidence and checked her development.

Ida had suffered from the same cause in a different way. It was impossible to keep back the religious question from her, inclined as she was and betrothed to Everard ; therefore, in her case, Lady Dytechley's efforts had been limited to the time being, and the means restricted to dark commentaries on anti-Catholic books. But Elfrida was not betrothed, was not inclined to be a Catholic, knew nothing about the Catholic faith except that her father made no objection to her being brought up out of it. She had been completely severed from the Church of her baptism, and was dealt with accordingly. Given the case and the intention, the course to be pursued was obvious. Freedom of mind encourages the instinct of inquiry ; therefore, as the general instinct might include the particular one, it had to be checked at all hazards. It was clear, first that affectionate repulsion must be practised, secondly that the process must be felt but not understood. The result appeared to be successful and permanently so, for by a judicious choice of books, imperceptible reserve and habitual kindness, development of mind and character had been checked, energy kept in abeyance, and religion brought down to the level of a *status quo* ; but then those means depended mainly on the presence of the repressor and the absence of contrary influences. Now the postponement of Ida's marriage removed both safeguards. It took Lady Dytechley away, and it forced Elfrida to think for herself during the troublous days that followed its announcement. At first she thought in the interest of Ida and Everard only ; but thought is prolific, especially when new, and from the lost note she passed on to circumstances, causes, possibilities, principles. The *status quo* had been disturbed and fixed ideas gradually unsettled. There was no distinct evidence of this on the evening of Everard's arrival, nor during the first half of the next day, though her marked silence was suggestive of something unusual within ; but after luncheon they went out riding, and then the meaning of her silence discovered itself.

"Is Freville Chase too far for you ?" said Everard as they passed the lodge. "I rather want to go that way, but another time will do as well."

"I should like a long ride very much indeed," said Elfrida, "and particularly to Freville Chase. Do go there."

They went on, and so did her silence, till they had turned a shady corner about a mile beyond the village, when she said, without any introduction :—

"I want you to explain many things that I don't understand and must understand."

"What are they?" answered Everard. "I don't understand many things myself, but what little I do is at your disposal."

"Why are Christians divided about the meaning of our Lord's words, which He must have intended to be plain?"

"Because some of them revolted from the authority of the Church He had founded," answered Everard. "That is the shortest answer I can give, and the least likely to clash against your feelings on the subject."

"I only feel that I want to know the truth," said she. "I thought I did know it; but things have been forced upon me in a strange manner lately, that make me doubt, and I *must* have my doubts cleared up. Please, finish what you cut short."

"When they revolted," said Everard, "they were obliged to differ from it, in some doctrine or other, and say the Church had corrupted that doctrine, for otherwise they would have had no cause to allege for their revolt; and they were obliged also to encourage private judgment on doctrine, more or less, for they had exercised it themselves and succeeded through the exercise of it in others. After a while some of their followers of course played the same game, for they had been taught it and given the principle. Others again revolted from them, individuals differed from individuals and from themselves at different periods of their lives, till, in these days, it is hardly too much to say that, outside the Catholic Church, there are more sorts of Christianity than there are people who profess it."

"Yes. I have often heard it said of people that they had such a beautiful faith of their own, and how the ideas of this person or that about one doctrine or another were so comforting. I saw no contradiction in it then, because I took for granted that there couldn't be any in what I had been taught; but, when one thinks of it, how can one have

a faith of one's own, or take one's own ideas as a guide about doctrine, without contradicting the Bible, which tells us that our Lord founded a Church and would be with it always, even to the end of the world? The very words prove that the promise was not limited to the Apostles; for they are dead, and the world has not come to an end. How then, in the face of that promise, and of His promise that His Church should be built on a rock, and that the gates of hell should not prevail against it, can we suppose Him to have limited to the Apostles the promise that the Holy Ghost should guide them to all truth? His Church is therefore permanent, and the Holy Ghost guides it to all truth, or our Lord's promise would have failed. What business then can any one have with a faith of their own, or ideas of their own about doctrine?"

"What you say is unanswerable," said Everard. "Do you like to canter up this sandy bit of rising ground?"

Elfrida put her horse into a canter, but continued the subject. "Don't you know where I got it from?" she said.

"No, I don't," said he. "I believe you to be quite capable of thinking out more than that for yourself."

"I got it from you."

"How did you do that, when we never spoke on the subject before?"

"Well, I didn't get it all from you, for I made up some of it, but I took the idea from what Ida said to me a month ago—the day after the dinner party at Bramscote. I know it came from you. She would not have put it in that way."

"If it did, I can't claim—mind that bagman swinging round the corner—I can't claim any originality; for the thing is self-evident."

The bagman swinging round the corner, followed by an unattached dog that ran after them, barking at intervals, interrupted the conversation, and a piece of unenclosed turf, on one side of the road, continued the interruption by its convenience for prolonging their canter. When they pulled up in a shady spot where the road had been mended with sharp stones of curious forms and sizes, she said:—

"I want to know, then, which *is* the Church that our Lord founded, and promised to guide to all truth."

"Ask yourself," said Everard, which of them looks most like it, which of them looks most like the Church of the

Apostles, which of them is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, as the Nicene Creed defines the True Church to be."

"There is my difficulty," said she. "I see that the Roman Catholic Church is one in Faith, and has one Head; but the Church of England is one with it in the most essential things, and believes in the Nicene Creed. How can we know that our Lord may not have permitted it to be as it is for some inscrutable reason—perhaps to keep up fervour, which might grow cold if everything were smooth?"

"You will find this a short cut and pleasanter than the road," said Everard, opening a gate. "These two fields cut off a corner. They belong to what is called a Charity."

"But you don't answer my question," said Elfrida, her dark eyes expressing disappointment, surprise and annoyance. "I ought to have known better—I know I ought. I ought to have known that you wouldn't care to answer the difficulties of a poor uncultivated girl like me. I must find my own way as I best can, or refuse to listen to them, as you do, and take for granted that there is no essential difference—no true Church distinct from the rest. A one True Church is such a beautiful idea, so satisfying, so consoling, so perfect, that as soon as the possibility occurred to me, I longed for it and believed it might be a reality. It was a beautiful dream, and I must think no more of it."

"It was Pilate who said, 'What is truth?' and then went away," remarked Everard, as he rode forward to open the next gate.

"I am not going away," she said, confirming the statement by the symbolical action of pulling up.

"But I hope you are coming through the gate," said he, "for my horse objects to keeping it open, and I am afraid of its going against you."

"I never knew you like this before," said Elfrida, as she passed through. "It is very, very unkind to treat me so. You wouldn't answer my question, and when I said that I had no means of finding out the truth without, you told me I was like Pontius Pilate."

"My dear Elfrida," said Everard, "I was only waiting to see whether you were in earnest or not, before I went any further and put myself into one of the awkwardest positions imaginable."

"I *am* in earnest—indeed I am—terribly in earnest ; for if I cannot be made sure that the Catholic Church is the one true Church, I shall end in believing in nothing. I would go through fire and water to know it and act upon it."

"Then I will help you in any and every way that I can."

"Thank you, dear Everard, a thousand times ; but nothing shall make me bring you into trouble : you have had too much already. I know the peculiar position you are in and, if I say nothing more than that about it, it is because duty and affection keep me silent. I ought to have thought of you before I asked you to help me. You must help me through some one else, when you have gone from here. I can wait, if you promise to do that, and"—

"No," interrupted Everard. "You shall not wait on my account. When a duty is evident, one must do it and leave the consequences to Almighty God. You were baptized a Catholic : you wish to be a Catholic, if you can be convinced that the Catholic Church is the only true one : you assure me that you do wish it and would make any sacrifice to secure what you desire. I must and will help you, to the best of my ability. Where did we leave off? I think the question was this"—

Here a loose horse came after them from the other side of the field, and Everard had to drive him away, at short intervals, till they reached the gate. When they were in the road again, he said :—

"Your idea, I think, was that the Established Church agrees essentially with the Catholic Church, proves that it does by believing the Nicene Creed, and has probably been permitted to differ from it on other points for some reason that we don't know."

"Yes, I did say that, and I imagined a reason that I am ashamed of, now that I think of it. I suggested that the differences were to keep up people's fervour—as if divisions about faith could possibly strengthen the fervour that comes from faith !"

"Well, that was a slip. We all make slips now and then. Let us try the essentials. The essence of a thing is that by which it is what it is, and not something else : therefore to say that two things are essentially the same, is to say that

they are the same in what makes them what they are. Am I clear?"

"Yes, I understand you perfectly."

"Well, then, that is the meaning of 'essential'; but the word is often misused in conversation, and made to stand for anything the speaker wants to guarantee as more important and necessary than something else. I am sure that you would intend to use it in its natural sense."

"I do, indeed, I used the word ignorantly; but please don't let me talk nonsense. I did so, but I didn't mean it."

"Well, then, I don't see how the Catholic Church and the Protestant Established Church can be said to be the same in what makes them what they are. The Catholic Church is necessarily in communion with Rome, as St. Irenæus said, who lived in the second century: the Protestant Church of England owes its existence to having separated from it. The Catholic Church teaches the doctrine of Transubstantiation: the Protestant Church of England distinctly denies it in the Thirty-nine Articles, which every Anglican clergyman is obliged to subscribe. The Catholic Church has seven sacraments: the Protestant Church of England has two. The Catholic Church teaches the doctrine of purgatory: the Protestant Church of England declares it in the articles to be a 'fond thing vainly invented.' The Catholic Church teaches that God never did and never will permit her to err in matters of Faith: the Protestant Church of England teaches that she does err on the most vital points. The Catholic Church teaches that General Councils are guided in their decisions by the Holy Ghost: the Protestant Church of England says in her Articles that they may err and have erred, 'even in things pertaining unto God.' The Catholic Church affirms the truth of our Lord's promise that the gates of hell should not prevail against the Church He founded: the Protestant Church of England denies it by explicitly stating in the Second Book of Homilies, which the Thirty-nine Articles declare to contain 'a godly and wholesome doctrine,' that 'laity and clergy, learned and unlearned, all ages, sects, and degrees of men, women, and children, of whole Christendom (an horrible and most dreadful thing to think) have been at once drowned in abominable idolatry, of all other vices

most detested of God and most damnable to man, and that by the space of eight hundred years and more.' The Catholic Church teaches that the Mass is the unbloody Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ, and that its intercessory value is infinite: the Protestant Church of England denounces both the sacrifice and the intercession as 'blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits.' I might go on much further, but probably you will think that I have said enough about that. I don't see how the Catholic Church and the Established Church can be said to agree essentially—to agree in that, by being which each is what it is—when they disagree as to whether the Pope should be obeyed as the Vicar of Christ and the successor of St. Peter, or not; whether in the Mass the bread and wine is transubstantiated into the Body and Blood of our Lord, or not; whether holy communion means receiving our Lord Himself—Body, Soul, and Divinity—or a piece of bread; whether there are seven sacraments or two; whether the millions who die in the grace of God, but yet not fit for Heaven, where no unclean thing can enter, go to an intermediate place of purification, or straight to hell; whether our Lord kept His promise to the Church He founded, or let the gates of hell prevail against the whole body of Christians for 'eight hundred years and more.' Have I said enough on that point?"

"Enough to convince me," said Elfrida, "that my idea of the two agreeing in essentials has no meaning at all, and that the Catholic Church and the present Church of England are two distinct religions, that cannot possibly be both true. What nonsense I have been talking! And it wasn't even my own; for, now that I think of it, I have heard the whole story, essentials and all (for that was the exact word) from Miss Pasteur, the Swiss governess; and I used to wonder sometimes how they could agree in that way, if one was idolatrous and the other not. But I supposed it must be right, and left it alone. She must have said so because my father is a Catholic, for she was very spiteful against what she called Romishism; but I have heard the same thing from others. The upshot of it was that certain people had a right to be Catholics by descent, but that those who became so would fall into something quite different and would be entangled in a sort of cobweb,

with the Pope for a spider. But what were you going to say next?"

"That depends on yourself, on what you want answered," said Everard. "The only thing that occurs to me, on the point we have settled, is this:—The Protestant Church of England believes, as you said, in the Nicene Creed, but not in the Catholic sense. I will leave the words, 'Holy Catholic, and Apostolic,' for the present; but how about 'One,' when she has separated from the centre of Christendom, has produced innumerable sects, and is herself divided on fundamental doctrines? But let us go to an earlier creed still, the Apostle's Creed, and see whether believing in the words necessarily means believing in all that the words contain. Henry IV. of France, before he was a Catholic, told the Duke of Luxembourg that he believed in it, and the Duke said, 'Yes, and you believe in God, but not in His omnipotence.' The King asked why he thought so, and the answer was, 'Because you don't believe that He can be present in the Consecrated Host.' The king was much impressed by the answer, and indeed it was and is enough to impress any one who thinks; for the usual Protestant objection to the doctrine is that, as our Lord's human body is in Heaven, It cannot be present in the Consecrated Species. If that does not implicitly deny His omnipotence, I don't know the meaning of words. People make the objection without seeing what it leads to."

"I have heard that objection often," said Elfrida: "in fact, I don't recollect hearing any other reason, except that the Reformers knew it wasn't so."

"And yet," said Everard, "their founder, Martin Luther, always maintained that it was, though with his usual inconsistency, he suppressed the elevation after consecration in the Mass."

"I remember reading that," said she, "and being told that of course he couldn't be expected to see everything, brought up as he had been. I rather wondered at his not seeing the triumphant objection that our Lord is in Heaven, which was conclusive to me then, and has impeded me since, till you pointed out what it leads to. The answer was that of course I could see it, because I had not been brought up in prejudices and superstitions, but that it was dreadfully unjust to find fault with a man who had done

more than any one to unmask the corruptions of Rome and enlighten people who sat in 'darkness and the shadow of death,' merely because he didn't live long enough to see everything. As I believed then that he really had enlightened all the world, and the rebuke was administered in a sad and solemn tone, I fancied that I saw all those people before me sitting in the dark, loaded with sins they couldn't help, and I asked no more questions. Yet how very simple it is ! It ought to be clear to every one that to deny transubstantiation on the ground that as our Lord's human body is in Heaven, it cannot be on the altars, is to limit His power and in fact to deny His omnipotence."

"Yes ; particularly as He said, 'THIS IS MY BODY,' and 'THIS IS MY BLOOD,' when He gave what seemed bread and wine to the Apostles. The one miracle is as great as the other. Protestants tell us that He used these words figuratively, meaning, 'This represents ;' and as the verb 'to be' would not bear such manipulation without endangering other passages, such as 'I and the Father are One,' somebody wrote a book many years ago to prove that in Syriac (which was the spoken language of the Jews at the time named) there is no word for 'represent,' and that therefore our Lord was obliged to say 'is.' Cardinal Wiseman proved that there were upwards of forty (about eight times as many as there are in English), and published the list, with examples from the best Syriac authors."

I can't see," said Elfrida, "that our Lord's Presence in the consecrated Host is more wonderful than His being both God and man at the same time. They are both the most stupendous miracles of power and goodness and mercy and ineffable condescension. I cannot understand how the Church of England can believe in the Trinity, which is not expressly taught in the Bible, and refuse to believe that our Lord gave His own Body and Blood to the Apostles at the last supper, when the Gospel tells us distinctly, in His own words, that He did so."

"You believe then that He did ?"

"I do ; and I believe, too, that when those words are pronounced at the altar, He becomes present in what was before bread and wine, as He did at the last supper. It follows from what He said to St. Peter and to the Apostles ; but I can't put it together properly. I wish you would for me."

•

"Well, it puts itself together simply enough. Our Lord told St. Peter that the gates of hell should not prevail against the Church founded on Him: which can only be the Catholic Church, because no other can trace a hierarchy from the lifetime of St. Peter and the other Apostles. Surely that is a sufficient guarantee against idolatry, which the Mass would be, if He were not really present after the words of consecration. Then he promised all the Apostles that He would be with them even to the consummation of (the Protestant version says 'the end') of the world; but they are dead, and the world has not ended. It is inconceivable that our Lord should be with a Church that commits idolatry, or be with it without preserving it from error of so abominable a kind: therefore it is inconceivable that the Catholic Church should perpetuate what He did at the last supper and told the Apostles to do in remembrance of Him, unless He becomes really Present when the Priest pronounces the words of consecration. But there is old Sandford coming along, riding a strange horse. We must leave the discussion where it is, and start again. We shall remember where we left off. It must be a lady's horse that he thinks will do for Ida. I have been ransacking every stable in the county, where I could hear that there was or might possibly be one to suit her.

The horse was a dark chestnut, a little under sixteen hands. He was nearly thorough-bred, and had a light sloping shoulder, every muscle of which moved with evident power and freedom as he walked. Everard dismounted, looked him all over, and said:—

"I like the looks of him very much."

"He is a downright good 'un, sir," said the old coachman. "I've had him these three days in the stable, and tried him in every way, and can't see no fault in him; and all as I have heard of him is good. But the man wants a long price."

"I don't care what he asks for him, if he turns out to be what I want," said Everard, as he lengthened the stirrups. "I don't give long prices, as you know; but this is a different affair altogether. If he is the horse I want, I must have him."

He mounted, walked the horse nearly a mile and cantered him round a meadow. Then he took him up to a thrashing

machine, a blazing fire of burning weeds, and a heap of many coloured clothes on a hedge.

"I like what I have seen of him," he said, when he rejoined Elfrida on the road. "Do you mind going a quarter of a mile out of the way? I want to see an old servant at a cottage just beyond that farmyard over there. We must take this bridle path to the right, that goes from Chase End to Exbourne, and come round through two fields into the road again by Chase Wood."

"I should like it very much. Is it any one I know?" said Elfrida.

"No; she went away just before you were born, and has not long come back to this neighbourhood. She is not, strictly speaking, an old servant, for she was only three years at Freville Chase; but she has gone through a great deal of trouble, in connection with the family, and she is a little odd in the head I think: so I have put her into that cottage next the farm-house. I will tell you about her after we have been there. I have reasons for wanting you to know it."

The cottage was from two to three hundred yards behind the farm buildings. There was an orchard at the back, a small but well-filled garden in front and, about fifty yards beyond, a narrow lane with banks and hedges on each side. At the sound of their approach a woman, whose age was neither apparent nor easy to guess, came out of the door to meet them. She had no distinct feature except her eyes, which were not remarkable in themselves, but only in their expression of excitability. It was Charlotte Wilcox, who had at last left her hiding-place and been placed by Everard in this, the only available cottage. They dismounted, and leaving their horses with Sandford, walked into the garden.

"Thank you, Squire, for coming to see me," she said, "and for putting me here. Is this Miss Ida?"

"I wish it were, as it ought to be," thought Everard, looking involuntarily at the horse that was meant for her. "No," he said with an effort: it is her sister. You don't remember her. She was born just after you left England."

"Ah! yes, sir—just after that dreadful time. And would you believe it, sir?—The Marquis went and called at my father's the very day he left Freville Chase. He made the flyman drive round by Chase End, and he talked ever so long with my stepmother. I have been told it by several

people from the village, who came to see me when they heard I was here. It put me about dreadfully, for he could only have gone to find out if she knew where I was : but I was safe then, through your kindness, Squire. He wants to make me out mad, and you know, sir, why he does. He would give anything to get me into an asylum, I know. I am afraid to leave the house by myself, and I keep the door locked all day, for, do you know, sir, that nasty servant of his has been seen about lately ; and what good can that be for, with his master abroad, if he really is ? But I don't believe he is abroad ; for you can't believe his saying so, after his going round by Chase End instead of to the station, without saying anything about it, as he would have done to you if he had meant right, and might have gone there any time when he was riding and walking about with you."

"I know he is abroad," said Everard, "for I had a letter from him yesterday with the Florence post-mark on it."

"Yes, sir, but he may come again. I know he wants to make me out mad."

"If he wanted ever so much, he couldn't do it without a certificate from two doctors and an order from a magistrate."

"But that scamp of a servant ! He wouldn't mind about sticking a knife into me, I know."

"He would mind being hanged, though. And how could he, a stranger, with such a marked face, get away without being caught ? But are you sure that he really has been seen about here since the Marquis left ? Have you seen him yourself ?"

"No, sir, not myself, but a person who knows his face, because she saw him before at Chase End, on the box of the fly. She saw him get out of a second-class carriage at Ledchester, with a great travelling cap half over his face, and push by her to get a fly."

"But how could she be sure that it was he, if his face was half-hidden and he was pushing by in such a hurry ?"

"Well, sir, that was because he didn't want to be seen by her."

"But why ? It is not likely that he would have noticed her face, among the others at Chase End, so accurately as to know her again and remember where she came from. And foreigners with black eyes and marked features are not so very uncommon at Ledchester. Most likely he was a

music-master, or that teacher of languages who comes here once a week to give lessons to the daughters of the Rector of Puddlecombe-in-the-Marsh and other people. But even if he is the man you suppose, his being at Ledchester wouldn't show that he was looking after you. He may have left his situation and taken one in England."

"Not he, sir. It's too good a place, and the Marquis can't do without him."

"Well, anyhow, no harm can happen to you; but if you feel nervous about going out, I will give you a bull-terrier that is doing nothing at the keeper's lodge. I engage that he will pin any one who molests you."

"Oh, please, sir, don't. I am very grateful for your kind offer, but I am so afraid of dogs."

"But you must go out sometimes. I tell you what I will do. I will send some one, every now and then, to take care of you and bring you to Freville Chase and back again. But I must be off now, for I have things to do at home, besides riding back to Netherwood. If you would like to have the bull-terrier let me know."

Charlotte Wilcox followed them to the gate, thanking Everard again and again for all his kindness.

"Who is she?" said Elfrida, as they rode away. "And what is all that about the Marquis—Moncalvo, I suppose?"

"She was nursemaid after my half-brother was born, and was his nurse when Moncalvo, who was his guardian, took him to Italy. He died there, as you know, and she not only fancied that Moncalvo had murdered him, but told Moncalvo so. He didn't like that, of course, and finding her very much excited about it, he suggested the idea that she was a little wrong in the head. She then went into the service of an aunt of his and remained there till her mistress died, when she took it into her head that he wanted to get her into a lunatic asylum; and so she came to England, working herself up into such a state of panic that she came and hid herself in the tower. One evening (it was the day he and Hubert left) I saw a light in the window under the muniment room, and went up, thinking that some thieves had secreted themselves there. I found no one in the room, but a rushlight was burning. I then went up to the hiding-hole, and there I found this woman, Charlotte Wilcox, who had hidden herself there when she heard my footsteps. She

told me what I have told you ; only she made a much longer story of it, and begged me to let her remain. She stayed there nearly a fortnight longer, and then was persuaded to come here ; but I should never be surprised to see her and the rushlight again in the tower. What can one do with a poor woman who has such an inconvenient monomania ?”

“Are you so sure that it *is* a monomania ?” said Elfrida. “She looks to me sane enough.”

“God forbid that it should be anything else ! Of course I have a very indistinct recollection of my little brother, for I was only seven years old when I saw him last ; but the idea that he was murdered is too horrible, as well as improbable, to be tolerated without any cause for suspicion whatever. His death was certified by an English physician of note, who happened to be staying at the place and saw him. I have the certificate, and can show it to you. The cause of death is specified in it.”

“Yes, of course. I spoke without thinking. I *do* dislike the man so much. But why does he persecute her so, if he has nothing to conceal ?”

“I have no evidence at all of his having done so—nothing but her own excited statement. He may have said that she had a monomania, and I think he did say so to me ; but how can you wonder at his making that small anticipatory defence. Just consider what it would be, to know or strongly suspect that a person was going about accusing you in holes and corners of carrying off your own sister’s child to murder him in another country ?”

“I see. You are always so just. The fact is, I can’t bear the man, and I can only see one thing at a time. You must teach me to see further. Have you heard from him since his visit ?”

“Yes, and he said in his letter that it was he who lost the note. I meant to have told you before, He met Tim, took the note from him, missed finding me, left it in his pocket, and unfortunately—forgot it.”

“Yes. He knew you must find it out, and made a virtue of confessing it.”

“You are as incorrigible about him as Hubert.”

Elfrida made no reply. Her eyes turned from him to the meadow before her, and then towards her horse’s withers, where they remained fixed until they had entered

the wood in which Hubert had called the attention of the Marquis to the old tom cat poaching, when she said:—

"I don't accuse him of hiding the note. I really believe it was an accident. But I must say it again—I can't help it—I detest the man more than I can express. I can't tell why. There is a great deal in him that is very attractive, and he ought to be good, and might be; but (I can't tell why) I hate the sight of him."

"There is something wrong in him, I know," said Everard. "He puzzles me. I often wish I had never seen him."

They were now at the gate leading into the Chase.

"Has this horse been exercised much since you have had him in the stable?" said Everard to the old coachman.

"Nothing, sir, only walking exercise. I wanted to see whether he was quiet."

"Then, if you will both of you go on, I will follow you and see what he does."

Elfrida and Sandford cantered on. When they had gone about five hundred yards, Everard, who had been walking the horse up and down near the gate, turned him suddenly and put him into a gallop. The dark chestnut stretched himself out and went over the grass in beautiful form, but without pulling an ounce or changing his position. He then raced him a short distance, pulling him up into a canter about a hundred yards behind the other horses, and joined them at a walk.

"I must have this horse at any price," he said. "He is perfect. What does the man want for him?"

"Well, sir," said Sandford, "that's it. He says he won't take no less than two hundred and fifty: but, I think, if you was to wait a bit"—

"No. I can't wait a moment," said Everard. "I can't wait to bargain, this time. He is perfect, and I see he is sound. I will send a cheque for him by this post. But there is one thing to be done. Have you tried him with a horsecloth hanging down like a habit?"

"I've done all that, sir, and put on a yeomanry sword. He don't take no notice of nothing, nor yet alongside of Thunderbolt when he was very fresh."

"Let me ride him part of the way back," said Elfrida. "Sandford could ride my horse, and we could change half-way."

"I should be very glad if you would. I am satisfied about his quietness, but I should like to see you on him. Your riding is about the same as Ida's, and if you find him suit you, as I feel sure he will, I shall have made assurance doubly sure."

"What were you doing when you stayed behind?"

"Only waiting to let you get forward, that I might see whether he would jump about or pull when I galloped after you with his head towards the stables. Nearly all the accidents and all the anxieties, fears and disenchantments that so often make riding a pain, instead of a pleasure, to ladies who don't go in for being horsewomen, arise from two causes—one of want of care in choosing the horse, or want of care in keeping him exercised—and generally from both. Many a lady has given up riding in despair, when it would be of more use to her than the doctor, simply because her father, or her husband, or whoever she had to do with, hadn't the sense to see that she was properly mounted."

"Yes; people don't think much. I have learned that in my small experience. If everyone were like you"——

"Everyone hasn't the same incentive to care that I have. If I were not careful about what concerns Ida, what in the world should I be careful about?"

It was half-past four when they rode into the courtyard. "You must have some tea," said Everard, "after your ride and all the talking and all the thinking you have done, and Charlotte Wilcox's wonderful revelations after it all. How long do you like to stay?"

"Oh! an hour at least. I have not been here since I was a very small child. You must show me all over the house. There never was so interesting a place. It really is like a dream. I wonder why I have never been brought here."

Everard thought that he knew very well, and so did Elfrida before she mounted her horse to ride home.

Mrs. Roland, who had peeped out from behind the portière, on hearing the sound of the gate-bell, came forth to learn what had brought Everard home unexpectedly. When she heard the cause of his being at Netherwood, she inly rejoiced, thought, with Hubert, that it was a lucky shot, and, like him, hoped that the whole charge had lodged

itself home. She also rejoiced on discovering who the young lady was; "for," thought she, "Miss Elfrida will learn a lot off him, and that will be a good thing for everybody."

Elfrida was no less pleased at making Mrs. Rolands acquaintance, and said, after she had left the hall :—

"Why have I never seen her before? Everything here is so full of interest."

The tea was then brought into the library, and Everard went to send off the cheque for the dark chestnut. On his return they began to go round the house.

"Where does that door lead to?" said Elfrida, pointing to the portière corresponding with Mrs. Roland's occasional place of observation.

"The passage leads on to the sacristy and the chapel; but on the left, just beyond the door, there is the state bedroom, called the King's room, and two rooms out of it."

"I want very much to see the chapel. Hadn't we better go their first?"

"Just as you like. It would be the most natural place to begin with, if you wish to see it, for it stands the furthest off, on that side."

"If I wish to see it! Don't you wish to take me there, after the talk we have had?"

"I wish to do so because you desire it: otherwise I should have no wish either way."

"You rather disappoint me by saying that. Don't you wish me to be a Catholic?"

"Of course I do. I wish that every one in the whole world would be so, and you particularly."

Then you can't believe that I am serious about it."

"I am certain that you are."

"Then why don't you try to help me in that way, as you did in talking?"

"I should, if I had thought you would find it any help; but I don't think you are one to be impressed in that way by externals. You want to be convinced, not interested—to see the truth, not to admire its outward symbols."

"But I *am* seeing it, How tiresome you are."

"Yes, you *are* seeing it—gradually, I think."

"I don't understand what you are at. I begin to think you want to keep me back."

"Not to keep you back, but to keep you from hurrying over a most serious and solemn act, an act which must, at your extremest peril, be final. I am ready and anxious to help you in any way that I can, and at any risk to myself, but I will not encourage you to rush at it and land on unsafe ground, like—

*Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other side.*

Perhaps we shall talk out a good deal before dinner-time, and you will think that all has been done. It may be so; for who can tell how and when the Grace of God, which alone can settle the question, will come into the heart of any one? But you may have difficulties after that—queer, troublesome, unreasonable difficulties, cropping up at odd times, or hanging about you like a dead weight. I don't say that they will, but I must not take it for granted that they will not, lest they should do so for want of having been cleared off beforehand."

"Yes. I understand. You are so very wise about it. But still I do want to be helped on, for I feel sure that I do see it. Won't you take me to your priest here?—I don't know his name."

"No. I will not have it said that a priest had 'got hold of you.' When you are in a position to take the final step, you may see Father Merivale, but not till then, if I can help it. I will take the whole responsibility on myself, if you will me."

"Of course I will. I look to you entirely. But do be as quick as you can."

They went into the chapel, and he showed her all that was to be seen. She scarcely spoke, but observed attentively, and before coming out knelt down for some minutes. Then they went into the sacristy, the King's room and the other two rooms belonging to it. Afterwards he took her into the gallery and the rest of the downstairs rooms, and then upstairs.

As they walked along the passage leading to the tower, she said suddenly,

"You must have thought it very odd that I didn't say anything about the chapel, and the King's room, and the gallery, and all that I have seen, but above all that wonder-

fully beautiful chapel. It satisfies everything—imagination, taste, mind, devotion. I could say nothing at the time.”

“Like the horn that Baron Munchausen’s postilion blew in the frost,” said Everard. “It will all come out by and by.”

“Yes; for I really did observe everything very closely, and admired it beyond measure. There never was anything so attractive as this dear old place and everything about it. But one thing quite took possession of me, so that I could think of nothing else, and can think of nothing else now. When I went into the chapel I was immensely impressed, of course, by all I saw—who would not be, so very beautiful as it is?—but I felt something more than that, something I could not explain. I felt a *Presence* there, that awed and yet comforted me. I have been puzzling over it ever since. Do explain it for me.”

“You didn’t expect any impression of the kind you speak of—did you?” said Everard.

“Certainly not.”

“And never heard of any Presence in a Catholic church, except that of the people who are in it?”

“Never.”

“Are you quite sure that you have never heard why Catholics genuflect in a church—why the Sanctuary lamp is lighted?”

“I am quite sure that I never heard a word about it.”

“Here we are at the tower,” said he, opening the great door.

“You won’t answer my question,” said Elfrida. “Why won’t you? You look so tremendously in earnest about it, and yet you put me off in that way. I don’t care just now whether this is the tower or the coal-hole. I ask you to explain, if you can, what it was that I felt while I was in the chapel.”

“I was thinking,” said he, “that it would be well to let your question stand over till we have been all through the house and are ready to start. It is not one to be interrupted. There should be no distractions when you enter upon that. If you will take my advice”——

“Of course I will. I know I am very tiresome and impatient, and you are so wise about it all, and so considerate: but I really mean to follow your guidance entirely. I know it will be all right.”

"I hope so, and I prayed hard for it when we were in the chapel, just now. Well, then, shall we go over the tower, and finish up with this room of mine at the entrance? There are some books there that you might like to see, and, if you should like to read them, which I advise you to do, I can have them taken to-morrow in the dogcart. Suppose we begin downstairs—but I must get the key of the muni-ment room."

He opened the door of his sitting-room, on the right, and brought out the key. She followed him to the staircase, down the stone stairs, to the great vaulted kitchen and offices, which were on the ground floor, where Mrs. Roland pointed out to her all that was to be seen. Then they went down again, to the entrance of some curious old cellars. "I must bring a light, next time," said he, and they went up stairs again. The old banqueting hall was still partially furnished, with a few high-backed oak chairs, a long oak table, and some stags' heads over the large fireplace. "This was the original house," he said, as he passed on to the other rooms. "It was a hunting-place of my family up to the sixteenth century, but the later buildings were added before it came into the possession of the younger line that I represent. We must come here again when we have more time."

They went up another flight of stairs, and finally to the door of the panelled room behind the upper staircase.

"There is the room that leads to the hidinghole," he said—"there, behind the staircase. That is the place where I went, expecting to collar a thief or two, and only found Charlotte Wilcox's rushlight."

He went in, pushed aside the moveable panel, and mounted the narrow stairs, followed by Elfrida.

"Where are we now?" she asked, when they stood at the top.

He replied by opening the great lid of the hiding-hole.

"This is where, in the time of Queen Elizabeth and James I., missionary priests used to be concealed, when they were in immediate danger of being tortured, hanged and cut in pieces alive, for doing their duty to God and man."

"I have heard of things being conspicuous by their absence, but I never knew what it meant till now," said

Elfrida. "I have read histories, and heard a good deal of those times ; but the facts you speak of were never referred to nor hinted at. Who were the missionary priests ?

"Men who were trained at English colleges abroad, when the Church had been despoiled of everything in England and it was made high treason for a priest to say Mass or give the last sacraments to the dying—men who were trained for martyrdom, graduated in it by a life of extreme trials, and, in a great number of cases, gained the martyr's crown."

"What an awful place, and what a story to think of!" said Elfrida, as she looked down into the shadowy depth, dimly lighted by the slit in the wall beyond.

"Very like a sawpit with a lid," said Everard. "A pleasant abode for a cultivated Christian, and particularly for a priest, obliged to shut himself up there, doing nothing, in order to do his duty when he might."

"This is enough," said Elfrida, "to make any one a Catholic who has any appreciation of true heroism. People will not go on suffering in that sort of way for what is false—they can't."

"True said Everard ; and "solitude will find out weak points, if there are any to find. But you must not be led by enthusiasm. It would lead you in the right direction this time ; but you mustn't depend upon it, or take it as a test of truth. Enthusiasm is a valuable friend, but a bad master. Shall we go on ?"

They descended the dark stairs into the room below, and went up the others to the muniment room.

"This room," said Elfrida, "makes one fancy oneself in the Middle Ages."

"It does ; and if you saw it by moonlight"—

"What is this curious inscription over the door ?—

*'When a Soule ys wonne by ye harte ytt bath ybrokenn,
and ye knelle ys berde of a dying race ;
ye losec shall winne by ye strayngere byr tokenne,
and ye dedde give lyfe unto Frevylle Chase.'*—

—Who wrote it? and what does it mean? Has it come true?"

"Nobody knows who wrote it. It was supposed to have come true at the end of the last century, but I really forget how. Mrs Roland knows more about it than I do. Now,

shall we look at the books? We have not much time to spare."

They made their way down the steep staircase and on to the sitting-room.

"I have some books here," he said, "that you should read. They will help you to find your way, or rather to see that you are on the right road. I will just put before you, as we ride home, what the question really is, and what you will have to consider as essential, in the strict sense—not in the other, which, I think, we have disposed of. Then, if you read and reflect, as I am sure you will, the conclusiveness of the truth will penetrate your mind, as the grace of God has, I feel sure, penetrated your soul. Of course no amount of intellectual conviction is of any avail without His Grace; but He has given us minds to understand, and it is not safe to neglect means that He has given. It may seem to you unnecessary now, but you will find the advantage of it afterwards. Early training and natural affection are against you, and you must not be surprised if they show their influence at odd times, after you had thought yourself convinced."

"If I know myself at all, they will not," said Elfrida. "Of course it will give me great pain to act in opposition to my mother on the most serious of all subjects, and the more so because she taught me all I knew of religion till to-day. It will bring a great deal of suffering upon me, I know that, and trouble most likely in many ways—I expect that; but it will have no power at all to interfere with conviction, in a matter that is between myself and God only."

"I believe you," said Everard. "You have a strong character. Still it is safer to do it thoroughly, and I want you to read what I am going to show you. We have seen that Catholicity and Anglicanism are two religions, distinct and incompatible, so that one of the two at least must be false. It remains to be seen whether either of them is true, and if so, which it is."

"But I am sure which it is. Why will you doubt it?"

"I am not doubting it; but let me go on. You then come to the conclusion that our Lord founded a Church which was to last to the end of the world, that He would be always with it, and that the Holy Ghost would guide it to all truth. We needn't repeat the reasons just now. The next conclusion was about the Real Presence; but that is included

in the question whether our Lord has continued to preserve His Church from error, or not—which you have already decided for yourself. You have come then to this:—That our Lord founded a Church, and that the Church He founded was, is and will be divinely preserved from destruction and from errors in faith. But where is this Church? In the words of the Nicene Creed, which is read at morning service in every Anglican church and chapel, it must be One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic”——

“Yes, and there is no doubt which is the One—you have shown me that—and I have no doubt about the rest; but I should like you to tell me why.”

“Not now,” said Everard. “It is getting late.” Here is a book (Waterworth’s Faith of Catholics) that takes those four ‘notes,’ as they are called, and all the marks of the true church, in succession, with the evidence from the Scriptures and from the Fathers, who had the traditions of the Church handed down from the earliest times: for St. Clement of Rome knew St. Peter, St. Polycarp was appointed Bishop by the apostle St. John, and St. Ignatius was one of St. John’s disciples. I advise you to read the whole book, or at least enough to show you how overwhelming the evidence is. Here are one or two things that will give you an idea of it. St. Irenæus, who had been taught by St. Polycarp, says (as you see in this second volume) that *‘the pathway of those who are in the Church circles the whole universe, for it has a firm tradition from the Apostles, and gives us to see that the Faith of all is one and the same, . . . and, indeed the public teaching of the Church, in which one and the same way of salvation is shown throughout the whole world, is true and firm. For to this was entrusted the Light of God, and on this account is the wisdom of God, through which He saves all men, proclaimed in the gates. . . . For everywhere the Church preaches the Truth.’*¹ Now, considering that the writer of these words had been taught by St. Polycarp, who, he tells us (here it is, if you look at this page) *‘had been instructed by the Apostles, and conversed with many who had seen the Lord’*² you have pretty strong evidence that unity was an exclusive mark of the Church founded by our Lord; and if you read on, you will find the same in the writings of

¹ Waterworth, vol. ii., p. 193.

² Ibid, vol. i., p. 253.

the 'other Fathers of the first five centuries. Again, St. Irenæus says (here it is) that '*where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God ; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every grace ; but the Spirit is Truth.*' And he says furthermore, that, '*the rest who depart from the principal succession, and assemble in any place whatever, we ought to hold suspected, either as heretics and of an evil opinion, or as schismatics and proud, and as men pleasing themselves.*'¹ If that doesn't condemn separation from Rome, I don't know what language would ; and here, a few pages on, he makes that passage, if possible, stronger by saying, '*The greatest and most ancient, and universally known Church of Rome—founded and constituted by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul . . . to this Church, on account of more powerful principality, it is necessary that every Church—that is, those who are on every side faithful—resort, in which (Church) always by those who are on every side, has been preserved that tradition which is from Apostles.*'² One more passage, and then we must be going. Here it is—an unmistakable prediction by the prophet Malachi, of the unbloody sacrifice of our Lord's Body and Blood in the Mass, and of its universality. '*From the rising of the sun even to the going down, My name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation : for My name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of Hosts.*'"³

"Unmistakeable indeed," interrupted Elfrida. "But go on."

"Well then, the second and third volumes give evidence and authorities about doctrine ; but I think you may leave them till afterwards, for if you see clearly that the Catholic Church is what she claims to be, it will be clear to you that her doctrines must be true."

"Certainly. The doctrines of the Church that is divinely guarded from error cannot teach error. Whatever you do, don't keep me back longer than you can help. I will read everything you want me to read afterwards."

"Well, then, just let me put out some other books to be sent ; and then we must go."

¹ *Waterworth*, vol. i., p. 20.

² *Ibid*, vol. i., p. 314.

³ *Malachias*, i. 11.

He took them from the shelves, carried them with the others downstairs to be packed up, and said :—

“Shall we go into the chapel for a moment?”

They knelt down at the nearest bench there, and after a while Elfrida said :—

“I feel it now, as I did before—a Presence.”

“You see that lamp,” said Everard. “It means that our Lord is present in the tabernacle—there, below the crucifix, His most Sacred Body is veiled under the appearance of bread, as His Divinity was veiled when He came in the flesh ; but He is there. We had better come away now.”

“Why? I feel so happy and peaceful here.”

Everard rose, and she followed him unwillingly. When they were outside the door, she said :—

“Does every one feel as I did, when they are in a Catholic Church?”

“No, and you must not be dissappointed if you never have the same feeling again. It is not for me to give any opinion about such things ; but that strong realisation of the truth, as it were a kind of interior sight, is sometimes given—that is, given when the case requires it. I know a lady, a convert, who experienced something of the kind when receiving conditional baptism. She told me that without it she should not have been able to bear what she had to bear, and did bear in consequence of becoming a Catholic. She has not, as far as I know, had it since. We must not desire to have it ; for, if it is good for us, God will give it. St. John of the Cross, one of the greatest masters of spirituality, says that invisible grace is better than sensible sweetness, and that to desire sensible sweetness is a very great imperfection.”

“I see. It brought into my soul what was only in my mind before, and gave me faith instead of mere intellectual conviction, which, of course, is not to be depended upon,”

“I believe she is right,” thought Everard. “Perhaps I was a little too cautious in giving her no encouragement to go into the chapel—only I felt sure she would.”

“And I wanted it too, no doubt,” said she, “to give me strength for what I have to do and to persevere in. I presumptuously thought myself strong enough ; but the trial will be very great, brought up as I have been, and feeling as I do. I realise the trial and the struggle now.”

"I am very glad of that. One may carry the principle of not looking on the dark side of things too far. When a thing has to be done, and we don't know how difficult and distressing it may prove to be, the sooner we accustom ourselves to the worst view of it the better. But I am not afraid of your looking away, or turning away from a duty when you have seen it. I am sure you will not. Shall we get on at the stables? It will save time."

"Yes, and give me another sight of the court-yard, which I wanted. It is the only part of the house that I have a dim recollection of."

The side-saddle had been taken off her horse and put on the dark chestnut. As they left the stable yard Everard turned to the old coachman and said :—

"I have sent the cheque ; so the horse is mine. Send the other back to Netherwood to-morrow."

"Well, I never!" remarked Sandford to himself. "I never know'd him in such a hurry about dealing afore. All as is, he's got what he wants. It would be hard to pick such another, give what you would—shape and action and all—and sound all over, and the quietest I ever see."

The merits of the dark chestnut occupied the attention of Everard and Elfrida, till they had passed Foxhole Wood and nearly reached the turning to Chase End.

"He is quite perfect," said Elfrida, as they went by the turning, "perfect even in colour. That very dark chestnut is so beautiful and so rare."

"And doesn't indicate being hot, which light chestnuts, particularly the reddish ones, generally are," said Everard. And that was all they said during the next twenty minutes or more. At last Elfrida spoke.

"I am as much astonished as the people in 'The Deserted Village,' that

One small head could carry all he knew.

You were more than ready for everything I asked you, and you told me much more than I asked."

"I had to answer things for Ida," said Everard, "nasty books that made me sick to read, full of lies and cunning. Happily for you they have not come in your way ; so that you have only had to deal with the 'essentials,' that fell to pieces when you laid hold of them. I had to read several

volumes of lies and blasphemy and disgraceful misrepresentations, for Ida, and I finished it up in—I don't know how many pages of foolscap, which I brought with me on that miserable evening when the note was lost and I came to Netherwood to find her gone,"

"I saw it all," said Elfrida, "and I was not as yet in a position to be of any use to her; but she had no doubts at all. She spoke very strongly to me about it one day, before I could see anything."

"Yes. I only meant to show that these difficulties are of many kinds, and some more subtle than others. You had been put into a very old-fashioned groove. You believed that Luther was a sixteenth century apostle, sent by God to dig up buried truth; but all that has been exploded. Hardly any one believes in Luther now, except a few old women round a tea-table. General Protestants (I mean those who, whether Anglicans or Dissenters, have a more or less indefinite creed) find him too dogmatic: the advanced Broad-Churchmen find him out of date: the few Evangelicals that yet remain incline more to Calvin, who denied the Real Presence. All three make much of him as the Founder of the Reformation, and admire his teaching in a general sort of way; but neither his authority nor his contradictions would have any weight at all in argument with them, and still less with the extreme High Church party, who abuse him and all the Reformers in unmeasured terms."

"I have heard so, and I can't make out what they want to do."

"To be a body without a head, if one may judge by their way of going on."

"What are the other books that you want me to read? Mayn't I read them all afterwards? I believe firmly that the Catholic Church is the one true Church, and therefore I believe in whatever it teaches. I want that penny Catechism I saw Ida reading once. Do let me send for Father Merivale. Life is uncertain in the youngest of us, and I don't feel it safe to remain as I am, feeling as I do."

"Nor should I feel it safe to take upon myself the responsibility of advising you to wait," said Everard, after a moment's reflection. "I thought it prudent to do so before, but prudence points the other way now. I was not prepared

for your ripening so rapidly, and I didn't believe in it. It puzzles me still."

"You see I was, in a way, ready for it," said Elfrida.

"I see. You were near, with a wall between."

"Yes; and when the wall was down, I saw where I ought to be."

"But the wall came down so quickly" —

"As soon as you pushed it. I was astonished myself, but so it was. You see, I felt I could believe in you."

"Yes, but I can't take all the credit of pushing the wall. You pushed very well yourself, as soon as you suspected what it was made of."

"No, I only crept through the hole you made. I suppose that my having been baptized a Catholic made it easier?"

"Yes, and your seeing the possibility before you in Ida—seeing it dimly and as a forbidden thing, but still seeing it—so that, when you began to see further, the sight was not entirely new."

"But there was another thing," said Elfrida, "that did more for me than any other human power—much more."

"What was that?" said Everard. "I think you have named the only two things that could have been of any use at all beforehand."

"Much more," she repeated absently. In fact it was that alone that made me long to know, made me ask, made me listen without prejudice."

"But what in the world was it? You have fairly puzzled me."

"It was knowing you" —

"When we never spoke a word on the subject till to-day? You must be dreaming."

"No! I am not dreaming!" she said, with a calm emphasis that compelled conviction. "I have dreamt a great deal in the course of my life, though it has been a short one, dreamt by day, dreamt when I was awake—at least awake to everything but the one Truth that leads towards the final object of one's life."

"I beg your pardon, dear Elfrida, for interrupting you," said Everard: "but how did you learn to express yourself in this way? I have noticed it several times. You have greater power than I thought, though I gave you credit for much more than you believed yourself to have. You have

had little or no cultivation, and yet you are beyond your age in mind and character. How did you do it?"

"I don't know," she said. "I have lived almost entirely alone, in a certain sense. My mother has been all kindness to me, but there was, as it were, a wall between us."

"She was holding up the wall that has just been broken down," thought Everard in a parenthesis.

"And Ida has been shut out from me, till within three days of her going abroad, by being engaged to a Catholic. I have not been out in the world yet; and the visitors we have had at home were not of much use, to say the truth. I was thrown upon my own resources, and had to make the best of them, small as they were. And so I gradually took to thinking, in my own uncultivated way, and tried to make something out of the books that were put in my way. That is all I have done with myself—and little enough it is, only you are so kind to me."

"It is not little. You surprise me by what you have done. I have had the best possible opportunity of judging to-day, and I tell you, without partiality, favour or affectation, that you have thoroughly surprised me."

"It was you who drew out from somewhere—I don't know where—more than was in me."

"No. Whatever I may have done, or be supposed to have done to bring it out, it could not have come out if it had not been there to come. But I have interrupted you. You were saying" ——

"I was going to say, that I was not dreaming when I told you who it was that prepared me to long for the truth, and attracted me to it; who it was that made me seek for it, and receive it when offered. It was you—not by anything you said to me, for you never mentioned the subject, but what I saw of you, by the silent influence of your character, by what you are and what you are not. Haven't I known you all my life, and most since you were tried most? Do you think I didn't observe the force you put upon yourself so often, when everything was against it except—what is the word for a motive that comes from doing what the Grace of God tells you to do?"

"The supernatural motive; but please don't apply the term to the bare duty that I did, if I did as much as that. You forget that I had Ida to think of—which means the

whole world, as far as it concerns me. It would have been odd indeed if I had not controlled myself."

"It's of no use to tell me all those things, for I know better. Don't I remember at the end of it all, that dreadful Monday, and how you bore one of the most unbearable trials that could have been put upon you? Do you mean to tell me that all this was natural—could have been done without a higher motive and the habit of always acting upon it? Do you expect me to believe that you are naturally calm, passive, patient? I have not known which to admire in you most"——

"You had better admire neither, whatever they may be. There is nothing to admire in anything I have done or forborne to do."

"But I know that there is; and you must let me go on, or I shall not be able to tell you what it was that influenced me without my knowing it. I say that I knew not which to admire in you most"——

"Please, don't. It isn't good for one, particularly when one doesn't deserve it. Of course I desired to act on the higher motive—I was bound to do so, and should have broken down if I hadn't—but carrying out is another thing."

"It's no use interrupting. You only make me repeat the words you don't like over and over again, instead of once. I knew not which to admire in you most—your strength to do, or your strength to endure."

"And what have you ever seen me do?"

"Never mind that: I know what you are, and I"——

"And what have you ever seen me endure that I could help?"

"You are not going to put me off by that, as if I didn't know the difference between not being able to help a thing and bearing it extraordinarily well. The other day, when I was out riding, I saw a cart-horse tread rather heavily on a man's foot. The man couldn't help being trodden on, but he swore and made faces as long as I could see him, and for anything I know, may be doing so at intervals still."

"I see there is no stopping you: so I may say as well be quiet, but only under protest."

"Let it be under anything you like, so long as you listen to me. I am telling the simple truth when I say that your influence, unknown to yourself, has led me to be a Catholic."

I know of course that the life and character of this person or that have nothing to do with whether our Lord founded the Catholic Church or not ; but one does want something - to make one begin, and the Catholic Church takes, as one can't help seeing, such very high ground, that one looks up to it in spite of oneself, in spite of believing it to be wrong, and one looks to the character and conduct of every Catholic as an example, one way or the other. I have hardly known any but you, and you have been the best witness I could have known. Without you, I should now be as I was."

"Thank God for the result, any how!" said Everard. "But that I should have had anything to do with the greatness of your effort and the immensity of the consequence, makes me think of the world standing on an elephant and the elephant on a tortoise. Now suppose we talk of something else for a bit, something lighter. You have done a great work in the last three hours, with the prospect of much more to do ; and the mind, like the body, requires rest after exertion. Even nuns in the most severe and contemplative orders have recreation ; and we, who are not called to that sort of life, want it much more. Who is that red-whiskered man who means so well, and has done so much mischief? I have met him several times, but, somehow or other, I never caught his name."

"And I can't remember it either," said Elfrida, "though he was staying with us nearly a week. It is a very peculiar name. He is some relation to Lady Oxborough. He is the most tiresome person I ever knew."

"Yes, he is, poor fellow. He is very conscientious, and proved it by giving up not only a good family living, but other good prospects as well, to become a Catholic and be shelved on a small allowance, without having at that time any apparent chance of being able to do anything for himself. I respect him very much, but he certainly is very tiresome. He has an incorrigible habit of saying and doing the wrong thing in society. He can't help it : he would, if he knew how."

"Yes, I could see that he was very good ; but he really did a wonderful deal of harm in a short time. He contrived in the most ingenious manner to make Catholicity unpleasant and offensive by half-joking attacks on Pro-

testantism and by extreme opinions of his own. It annoyed and excited my mother very much, made everything worse for Ida, and undid in me, for the time, nearly all the good that your example had done. If things had not happened as they did afterwards, to make me think more reasonably, I should not be a Catholic now, and perhaps never should have been."

"No. It would only have been a question of time with you—I feel sure of that: but with many the mischief would have been serious, and very likely permanent. Converts may be divided into two classes—those who are as if they had always been Catholics, and those who are not. Some of the latter class are occasionally very trying. They are like a parched pea on a drum: they can't be quiet. They seem, as it were, spiritually drunk. You would find occasional specimens of them in Rome, where they frighten away half-inquiring Protestants and furnish illustrations for domestic arguments against Popery. They mean very well, and are very much in earnest, but they are a great nuisance. You will not be like that: you are too well balanced. But those little patches of sharp colour and cold shading are in strange contrast with the harmonious largeness that characterises the centre of Catholicity."

"One peculiarity of his," said Elfrida, "is, that he continually brings in Italian words to explain about religion; which only has the effect of making Catholicity look foreign and new."

"Which is the modern English tradition," said Everard, "though we learned constitutional principles from the Benedictine monks and owe all our fine buildings and all our distinctly English customs to Catholic Englishmen."

"I know it is the modern English tradition, as you say, that the Catholic faith is a foreign importation. The Swiss governess used to tell me so continually, and I wondered, sometimes, how that could be reconciled with England's having been Catholic so much longer than it has been Protestant."

"There is no excuse for bringing in foreign words now," said he, "for it is not done in these days. When my father was a boy, and even later, it was the fashion to interlard conversations with bits of French, not always of the best; and it seems that, in the days of Dr. Johnson, ladies used

to call out '*caro*' at the opera when the primo tenore pleased them. One finds it for instance in Goldsmith's play, '*She Stoops to Conquer*.'

*The fourth act sees her wedded to the Squire,
And madam now begins to hold it higher,
Pretends to taste, at operas cries 'caro,'
And quits her Nancy Dawson for 'che farò,'*

Whether the false quantity was made to agree with *caro*, or *caro* brought in to rhyme with Goldsmith's pronunciation of the words in '*che farò senza Euridice*, I don't know."

"Now I think of it," said Elfrida, "a great aunt of mine (you must remember her at Netherwood when I was very small) used to talk in that way."

"Yes. I remember her very well, and I remember several people who did it when I was a boy. It was an affectation, though an unintentional one, and it spoilt their English; but mannerism of some sort appears to be an incorrigible failing in human nature, and those bits of French that came in without rhyme or reason were, at any rate, much better than the slang and sloppy sentences that one hears now in society. The English is worse and the affectation is greater, and the whole is offensive, which the other was not. There is another obsolete fashion of those and earlier days that I really regret. I mean the habit of bringing in Latin quotations and occasionally Greek. I remember about the last of it when I was a little boy. The two or or three old gentlemen who did it are all dead, and they were anachronisms then. It was sometimes carried to a tiresome excess on the right side; and it guaranteed a certain amount of mental cultivation in many men who, but for the force of fashion, would have had none at all. But I was going to ask you—hasn't your friend of the red whiskers succeeded to a property?"

"Yes," from an uncle. "They say it is a very interesting old place, with a black and white timbered house; but the property is very much encumbered, and the house out of repair. I am very sorry for that."

"Yes, poor fellow. It is a very hard and difficult position, to have a property that brings a quarter of its nominal value and more than the whole of its full claims. But I hope it has been exaggerated. Those things generally are, one way or the other."

Here the conversation was brought to an untimely and abrupt end by the approach of a bicycle, surmounted by a man dressed in a blue flannel jacket, a blue and white cap, knickerbockers of no particular colour, and grey stockings that moved up and down in the form of a spider's when he is weaving his web. There could not have been a worse place to meet such a machine, for some heaps of stones, put ready for breaking, narrowed the available space. The road was exceptionally narrow at that spot, and the bicycle came suddenly round a corner.

"Just keep a hand on him," said Everard, riding up close to the dark chestnut, and watching him attentively, "for he may never have seen one of those abominable things before. The roads are too hilly for them where he comes from."

The dark chestnut turned his head and looked at the movable treadmill with some appearance of curiosity, but showed no symptom of fear or resentment, though Everard's horse, which was furthest from it shied resolutely and, but for a sharp dig of the spurs, would have turned round.

"What a darling horse!" said Elfrida. "I am sure he never saw one of those things before, by his looking at it so; and yet he went on just the same, though it passed close to him, and your horse was troublesome about it."

After this interruption they talked on various subjects, including, after a while, Sir Richard's accident.

"How wonderfully God brings good out of evil!" said Elfrida. "But for the postponement of your marriage and the awkwardness of the red-whiskered man, my father would never have understood you, and I should be still trying to satisfy myself with 'essentials.'"

"You must mark that off to the credit of your recent guest, against his misdemeanours at Netherwood," said Everard.

"I do; but he really was"—

"I don't doubt it; but De Beaufoy told me that Mrs. Atherstone gave him a useful lesson when he dined at Bramscote. So I daresay he learned something. Didn't you find him less aggressive at breakfast the next morning?"

"Now that you speak of it, I think I did: but he went away directly after."

They were now coming to the sandy bit of road, and

they cantered on, talking in a desultory way. After a while, Elfrida spoke less and less, and then not at all, till they passed the lodge, when she said :—

“What a change has come over me, and over everything connected with me, since I passed the gate four hours ago ! I feel so different, and yet so much more myself.”

“Because you have found your whole self,” said Everard. “The greater part of it was out of sight before, hidden up in a corner.”

“It was you, then, who brought it to light,” said she, “I couldn’t have done it without you.”

“I may have been an instrument, or rather one instrument ; but if I had not been here, God would have chosen some other if it was His will to make use of one ; or He would have dealt with you in some other way. Your disposition to correspond with His will and His Grace would not be permitted to fail for want of sufficient help.”

“Certainly : but unless I had had your help, or some other equally strong—and where should I have found it, circumstanced as I was ?—I should not have had sufficient for the purpose. God must have made things happen so that you had to come here.”

“I may have been made use of in that way : but you make too much of the instrument. Much more depended on you than on me, and would, even if I had been up to the work, which I cannot feel that I am. One may make ever so good a key, and handle it like a locksmith ; but if the lock doesn’t fit it, the door will not open. The result really depended on your own dispositions, and might have been just the same, and have happened as soon, without any human instrument. People have been converted by the Grace of God in their hearts, without any visible help at all.”

“Yes ; but as a matter of fact, I was not. You have been the instrument, most distinctly ; for, as I said before, it was your example that prepared the way, before I ever spoke a word to you on the subject, or thought of doing so.”

“My example ! When I hear that, and measure it with what I have done, I feel how very much is wanting in me to complete even the outlines of the ideal example which your imagination has pictured.”

They had passed the house and were turning into the stable-yard.

"By the by," he said, as they rode in, "your father must know it as soon as possible. When do you think of telling him?"

"I thought of doing so to-morrow morning," said she. "I am so tired now, after all I have gone through. I shall explain myself better in the morning."

"True; and your mother?"

"I shall write to her to-morrow, of course."

When they had dismounted, he said to the coachman, "what do you think of this horse? I have just bought him."

The coachman stood square to his front, looked the dark chestnut all over, and replied:—

"Well, sir, he *is* a good 'un. I can't see a fault in him. But you always had a capital eye for a horse."

"I didn't find him out," said Everard. "Sandford got hold of him."

It was now seven o'clock. Everard went into Sir Richard's room and amused him with a graphic account of the new horse, till he had barely time enough to dress for dinner. Elfrida, while taking off her habit, began to argue internally against his denial of her statements respecting himself.

"He may say what he likes about it," said she to her inner self; "but his example and the quiet evidence of his beautiful life, did prepare me to receive the truth, did attract me to it: and the way in which he answered my questions did make it clear to me, and what he said when we came out of the chapel did make me understand what I felt. I have read nothing about saints yet, and I have always supposed hitherto that they lived in caves and ate roots; but if they are ever to be found in ordinary life, he is one. What a wonderful expression there was in his countenance when he was explaining things to me, and again in the chapel, and again at the last, when he tried to make out that the example I spoke of was an ideal of my own. There was a far-off look in his eyes, as if his thoughts were at that moment out of himself and fixed on God. There was a strange light in his eyes, and, as it appeared to me, on his face too, that I never saw before in any one, and never could have imagined. His is a wonderful character! So strong to do, so strong to resist, so full of fire and vigour, and so

self-controlled! So passionately loving to Ida, and so detached from the world they live in. Ida ought to be the happiest woman living, and will be, must be—must be.”

By this time the process of dressing impeded her reflections, but when she was on her way downstairs—the last emphatic idea repeated itself:—

“Must be—yes! must be, even now, in spite of all the troubles and delays—*must* be, even now, the happiest woman living.”

This very strong opinion occurred often in the course of the evening and afterwards. Everard, by the fact of being what he was, had done another work of which he was quite unconscious. He had given Elfrida an ideal of a husband and, by causing her to realise Ida's happiness, changed her from a thinking child into a woman.

After dinner they went into Sir Richard's room. The wounded sportsman was very cheerful, for the doctor had told him that he was progressing very favourably, and would be in his normal state by the beginning of the hunting season. He joked about the red-whiskered man, laughed much at his real and supposed sayings and doings, asked many questions about Mrs. Roland and all the old institutions of Freville Chase, told them a long story whose commencement had something to do with Beynham, but had no perceptible point, and finally discoursed on what he had heard of the dark chestnut till the stable-clock tolled midnight, whereat he seemed surprised. Elfrida had long been exhausted by all she had done during the day, and was fast asleep in her chair.

Thus ended that eventful day; which, however, was but the beginning of others more eventful.





CHAPTER XV.



E read in the "Lady of the Lake," that
Hope is brightest when it dawns from fears ;
but Sir Richard was not of that opinion when he heard of what Elfrida had done and was about to do. In fact the hope of escaping an aggravated tantrum was so low in the horizon, that it could hardly be said to have dawned at all."

About ten o'clock Elfrida came into his room, and after a few words of affectionate inquiry, plunged *in medias res*.

"My dear father," she said in a low voice, but with remarkable distinctness, "I have to tell you what will be very welcome news. I am now a Catholic in heart and in faith, as well as by baptism."

Sir Richard made an involuntary spring upwards, descended as lightly as he could, and replied :—

"God bless us all ! My dear child—you know—don't you see ? It *is* welcome news indeed, and a great comfort to me, who have had it on my conscience all these years ; but it comes at such an awkward time. What made you think of it just now ? It must have been Everard. Why couldn't he have left it alone till afterwards ?"

"Because I asked him to help me now," said she. "I should have had no other opportunity."

"Well, no ; that's true," said Sir Richard, adding in confidence to himself. "I know who would take care of that ; and if she had come to me instead—Good gracious ! what should I have done ?"

"And I should hardly have liked, under the circumstances, to have asked you," said Elfrida.

"I am glad you didn't do *that*," said he in a tone that would have convinced any one. "But, you see, there is the wedding to be thought of. There'll be such a row. Couldn't you put it off a bit?"

"I think you will see that it can't be put off," said she. "I am sure that you will not suspect me of any disposition to act in any way against your wishes, nor of setting myself up to know better than yourself"——

"No, no, my child, certainly not. I should never think that. You have always been as good as gold. Let us talk it over quietly, and see what is to be done. Where is the difficulty about waiting a little—just, you know, till the wedding is over?"

"If I do that," said Elfrida, "I shall stand convicted of temporising with my own conscience and wilfully deceiving my own mother—in fact of doing ill that good may come of it, which is just what Catholics are falsely accused of doing. I don't know how I could put you, myself, Ida and Everard, in a more false position, or help more to justify people in their own minds for the calumnies they repeat about Catholic principles. I feel so strongly the right of parents to exact obedience from their children, and the duty of children to obey, that I am prepared to wait till after the wedding, if you require it, trusting that Almighty God will accept my intentions and preserve me to fulfil them: but I implore you not to require it. Do not place me in the dreadful position of leaving all the responsibility with you. I am young, but life is uncertain and death sometimes comes unawares. If I should die in the meantime out of the Church, it will be in obedience to you. Don't, I entreat you, bring upon me the grief of seeing you take upon yourself such a responsibility as that. I can't share it with you, as you know. It *must* be your own."

"*Donne, Donne! Eterni Dei?*" thought Sir Richard, moving about, in his disquietude, as much as his condition would allow. He had picked up those three words of Italian at the opera, and was in the habit of quoting them to himself on emergencies. Elfrida stood still and waited his reply.

"What am I to say? What am I to do?" he thought.

"I don't see any way out of it—I really don't—for the worst of it is that she is right. If she had only not put it in that way! Responsibility! Every one has been at me about that, and I see it—I do indeed. But in this case the other side is so awkward. She is right, I see, and she is so good, and so respectful, and so obedient—which hardly any one is now. She is right; but, somehow or other, I wish that she hadn't shown it before me so."

It is probable that, had he been given the power of choice, he would have preferred the tantrum in the family coach to his actual position.

"Well, you see," he said at last, "I can't take upon myself to interfere with your conscience, when you want to come back into the Church. It was bad enough to have left you to drift out of it before you were old enough to know better. I have enough to answer for, without any more, and if my time were to come again—but it's no use—no use talking of what is past. 'What's done can't be undone,' they say; but the mischief I let be done has been undone as far as you and Ida are concerned, though I have had nothing to do with undoing it, I am sorry to say. Well, it's a great blessing, and I am sure I am very thankful for it; but the awkward part of it is that your coming all right, just at this time, may bring out some doctor or other to recommend more foreign travelling. I don't see where that sort of thing is to stop—eh?"

Elfrida remained silent for a while and looked very grave.

"I ought to have seen that," she said; "but now that I see it, I can see no further. May I call Everard?"

"The best thing you can do. He is the most sensible, right-judging fellow in the world. Do bring him here, and let us hear what he has to say."

She left the room and, guessing that he was not unlikely to be found in the neighbourhood of Ida's new horse, went to the stables, where she found him.

"Do come!" she said. "We are in a dreadful difficulty."

"What is it?" said Everard, walking back with her to the house.

"I must either do wrong or bring trouble on everybody."

"I daresay it will turn out to be nothing, after all. One often fancies that things are very bad, when every one else

can see they are not. We are all of us bad judges in our own cause."

Elfrida tried to reply, but after repeating a few incoherent words, burst into a violent flood of tears.

"I am not used to crying," she said, making a great effort to speak intelligibly, "and I don't remember doing such a thing since I was a child. I have not had occasion to feel very much, I suppose; for it came upon me in such a way that I couldn't help it. But it was too much for any one with any feeling, to think that what you have done for me should bring trouble on you."

"Is that all?"

"All! And isn't it enough, to have the alternative of deceiving my mother, bringing scandal on Catholic principles and temporising with the Grace of God, or repaying all you have done for me by"—

"I see what you mean. In the first place, you would not be temporising with the grace of God by waiting, if prudence required that you should wait; but, as a matter of fact, prudence does nothing of the kind. Stay a moment and let us settle the question before we go indoors. A prudent act, in the higher sense of the word, which is the only sense in which it concerns what we are speaking, means a judicious application of a right principle to the particular circumstances of the case that requires it; otherwise it becomes mere caution, with a strong family likeness to trimming. Now, prudence, in that sense, requires you to avoid giving the appearance of a bad example and false ideas of Catholic practice: it requires you *not* to run the risk of giving both, which you would do by trying to avert troubles that have come before, without any such cause, and could as easily come again without it. When one sees what is right to do, one must do it as prudently as one can, and leave the rest to Almighty God."

"Yes, of course; but"—

"But what? you really may feel quite satisfied about it?"

"Yes, and I know it is very wrong of me to have such a wish; but I can't help wishing, in spite of myself, that Almighty God had made somebody else help me; for then it would all come upon me, instead of involving you and Ida."

"You dear, simple child. Don't you know?—you make

me say what I oughtn't to say—don't you know that somebody would give me the credit of the deed, whether I had anything to do with it or not ?”

“So you really think it makes no difference ?”

“I am certain it doesn't.”

“Then, in fact, I couldn't prevent anything, do what I would.”

“Not without being in the wrong before God and man ; which could hardly be expected to bring a blessing on me, if I were to advise it.”

“But, if you could only have been married first”——

“In that case I should have been away, and consequently I couldn't have been of any use to you ; and, as you wouldn't wish to remain as you were, you must either be satisfied with things as they are or be dissatisfied with the means that God chose for you.”

“God forbid ! I only meant”——

“I know you didn't mean that, but in reality there is no other alternative. Are you satisfied now ?”

“Yes, quite ; thanks to you again. We had better go in now. My father wants to see you about it.”

“There is another thing to be considered,” said he, as they were walking upstairs, “one that has weight enough in itself to decide the question for you. Your mother, it is true, shows no disposition to be a Catholic, and I see no reason at present to expect that she ever will ; but who can venture to say that doubts and troublous questionings and undefined images of truth outside her experience may not, some day, come into her mind and heart as it came into yours ? You tell me that my example (I can't imagine how) attracted you towards the Church ; which implies that a worse example would have repelled you. Who can say how much, how lastingly, she may be influenced by your behaviour now, when everything you say and do will be attributed to the influence of your religion ? What would be the effect on her, if she found that the very first thing you had done was to conceal your faith and deceive her ? I know her well enough to be sure that nothing you could do afterwards would undo the effect of that. Have I said enough ?”

“You have, indeed. How strange it is that I didn't see it all myself !”

"You would have seen it fast enough, if it had not been your own affair. One naturally takes a side in one's own case, and that makes one an advocate instead of a judge. Besides, your feelings were enlisted, and you were altogether upset."

"I was, but you have put me to rights. How do you manage to say the right thing always and exactly in the right way?"

"You have posed me now," said Everard, opening the door of Sir Richard's room. "How can I explain what is not?"

Ah! I am glad you have come," said Sir Richard. "I wanted to see you."

"I should have come before, only I couldn't help going to the stables to have a look at Ida's new horse."

"To be sure. I wish I could have gone with you to look at him. But we both wanted you, about a difficulty that neither of us could see our way out of. Has she told you what it was?"

"Yes; we talked it out on our way from the stables, where she found me."

"And what did you make of it?"

"That she is not to think about me in the matter."

"I never made that out of it," said Elfrida, "and never would."

"Well, it was a way of speaking, a short cut to the upshot; but I was forgetting that we had not talked it out here."

"That is just what I want to do," said Sir Richard. "Let us talk it out."

"I beg your pardon for beginning with the end," said Everard. "The fact is that we finished it off just as we were coming into the room, and so I went on thoughtlessly with the end of it."

He then repeated all that he had said to Elfrida, and when he had finished, Sir Richard said:—

"Very true and convincing. You have put it as straight as can be. I am sure I don't know what to say. There is no getting over what you have said. It all comes as clear as possible. But how about Ida—eh? You can go through a deal yourself, I know, for a principle—whatever that is, which I never could quite make out—but you wouldn't

like to bring Ida into a scrape. Now, supposing anything were to happen?"

"I don't quite understand," said Everard, not without a scruple as to the strict veracity of the statement.

"Well, you know, anything to bring bothers and a blow-up, and—mind, I don't say that such a thing would be. But any sort of—there are doctors about, you know."

Everard groaned inwardly. "I did hope," thought he, "that the shots had driven in some notion of seeing justice done to his own child; but one might as well expect the leopard to change his skin. He can't help it."

"What do you say to that—eh?" said Sir Richard, raising himself up as much as his condition would permit with comparative impunity.

"That a doctor was very much about before Elfrida thought of being a Catholic," answered Everard, "and that (as you compel me to say the truth) it would be difficult to find one ready for such hard swearing as the man was who ordered the journey to Baveno."

"It *was* going near the wind, I admit—if he quite said it all—but then there are so many ways of understanding things. For my part I don't see much use in language, for it goes into such odd meanings—doesn't it? Some other fellow might be found, you know, to make out something that would be very awkward for you and Ida."

"In justice to everyone concerned," said Everard, "there is a limit to the postponement of a marriage approved so solemnly by yourself and all who had authority to do so. You have the power to carry out your own voluntary promise, made when Ida was a baby, continued ever since, and known to every one who knows you. In case of any impediment or further delay, I shall claim the protection which your promise and your authority give me the right to demand."

"That's all very true," said Sir Richard, looking forth into space, while the expression that was, or might be, in his eyes grew less as the rounded expanse became larger. "It's all as true as can be, and you said it so well—you're a wonderful clever fellow. But I have got so many things to consider."

"I beg your pardon for questioning your wiser judgment," said Everard; "but with every feeling of respect and regard

to yourself personally and of reverence to Ida's father, I must affirm that there is only one."

Sir Richard made no immediate reply, and appeared to be considering some of the many things that awaited his final decision.

"Perhaps we had better leave you to think over it all," suggested Elfrida, with truly feminine tact.

"Just so," said he, settling himself more comfortably on the sofa that, a few weeks before, had held Lady Dytechley and her smelling bottle. "I feel rather uncomfortable just now. I should like to think it over quietly. By the by, I had a letter this morning from Mrs. Sherborne, asking you to go to luncheon. Suppose you ride there and call at Bramscote afterwards. Your mother meant to have called before she went abroad."

They left the room, and he proceeded to reflect on the state of affairs; but his views on the question were of a purely subjective kind, as befitted the nature of his apprehensions.

"What a fool I was," thought he, "though he *is* such a comfort to me in many ways, to have brought Everard here! To go and bring all this down upon me, when he was enjoying himself at Beynham, and would have stayed there till close on the time of their coming home! Elfrida would have come into it all in good time—I am sure she would—and it would all have come right, and have been so much better than lugging everybody into it in this way. But who would ever have thought of her taking this sudden turn because Everard took her out riding? Fool that I was, to send them out! But then, who in the world could have guessed what was going to happen? How on earth could she make it out so quick? She didn't see a cross in the sky, like Constantine the Great. The worst of it is that I don't know what to answer—both of them put things in such a way. He made out his case as straight as could be, and so did Elfrida before. And there it is! Here am I, tied by the leg; and *she* will be coming back in another three weeks, and kick up a row, worse than the other. And I can't get away! It's all that red-whiskered fool—I never can remember his name, and I don't want to remember it. He brought on the first row by not coming inside, and then nothing would serve him but he must go and miss a

wounded bird and send the whole charge into me, when he couldn't have hit a haystack if he had tried. And that made me send for Everard, and that gave Elfrida a chance of asking questions, and—there it is, there it is ! ”

Here the approaching danger of an aggravated tantrum with pathological consequences assumed a pictorial form, and his disquietude became too great for words. Whilst he was thus thinking it out after his own fashion, Elfrida was endeavouring to show cause why Everard ought to go forth without delay and return with Father Johnson. Everard objected to doing either, especially the errand.

“ But you told me yourself,” said she, not to wait ”——

“ Certainly ”——

“ And yet now you won't help me to go on.”

“ But I will, very much. Father Johnson must first satisfy himself that you are properly instructed.”

“ Of course : and you are going to do it for me. How kind and thoughtful, and ”——

“ Suppose we leave the third adjective and settle what is to be done. You see, there will be no loss of time. We shall avoid the appearance of undue haste before people who don't know the circumstances, and the credit of the work will fall on me, instead of where it would attract exceptional ill-feeling and complicate your difficulties.”

“ Forgive me, dear Everard, for being so impatient,” said Elfrida, the tears welling up into her eyes at the recollection of all that he was, and all that he had done for her. “ And there is that wonderful smile,” she thought, “ that tells one what one is, and without a word of reproach makes one reproach oneself when one is wrong, and yet shows one the best of oneself.”

“ But you were quite right to be impatient,” said Everard. “ ‘ Bless us all ! ’ as your old great aunt used to say, what is to become of us, if that is to be set down against you ? If the end we were created for is not enough to make one speak up, I don't know what is. If there was any fault, it was mine for not finishing at once what I had to say.”

“ No. I interrupted you ”——

“ Simply because I didn't go on. You were quite right to make a row about it—you were indeed.”

“ Then you will teach me, and show me what I have to do ? ”

“ Yes. I have more time for it than Father Johnson

would have, besides the time when we are out riding. But we mustn't stand here any longer. There is that letter to be written, and you have to get ready for riding to Hazeley and Bramscote, and we must set off about twelve o'clock. Will you ride the new horse?"

"Certainly, if you will let me ride him."

She retired to the old school-room, and began to think of what she should say to her mother, or, to speak more correctly, how she should say it. Everard was about to return whence he came, to amuse Sir Richard by desultory talk and readings from newspapers, when the latter made a sudden exclamation of joy and pulled the string that carried on the bell-rope to his sofa. He pulled once, twice, and then tugged again. A happy thought had struck him, and if the wish was father to that thought, it was grandfather to the bell-ringing.

"I've got it now," he thought. "It will put everything to rights and please everybody. They have always been wanting Elfrida to go and see them at Hazeley, and there was always some difficulty made, but no objection, no objection ever. And now that she is left here, with her mother and sister gone, and me laid up in one room, and Everard here only by chance, it comes quite natural to let her go. And then—why, if she makes it right there, I shall have had nothing to do with it, nor Everard, as far as any one need know. Sherborne won't mind what any one says or does, and would rather enjoy the row. And she wouldn't mind it. I'll write at once. Why can't they answer the bell?"

At this moment Everard came into the room, intending to furnish amusement without instruction, in the shape of general talking and desultory readings from newspapers. Sir Richard jerked himself round on the same sofa that held Lady Dythchley when she told him that "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward," and explained his plan in a few characteristic words. Everard was prepared to second the proposal, having already thought of it, and he expressed himself to that effect, suggesting however that the visit should not be immediate, but in a few days' time. Sir Richard caught at this apparent delay with much alacrity, failing to see that it was proposed in the interest of the penny catechism.

"Then I had better just write a note, and you can take it," said Sir Richard.

The note was written, and then came the general talk interspersed with readings from newspapers. In the meanwhile Elfrida was engaged in the painful task of revealing her faith to the mother who, up to the last few hours, had taught her all she had known of religion. The letter was short in length, but, when read, seemed rather long by reason of its completeness. The facts were stated simply and modestly in terms of great affection and reverence, but with due regard of what she was professing. There was not a shadow of apology, not a word of defence, not an expression that would suggest the idea of an alternative, or admit a doubt as to her sole responsibility.

"No one persuaded me," she said. "I never mentioned the subject to any one till I had seen that I must go through with it and made up my mind to do so, as you most certainly would, under the same circumstances, without a moment's hesitation."

Of Everard she wrote :—

"He came here from Beynham the day before yesterday, and has been a great comfort to my father, who has been suffering very much from the accident I mentioned in my last letter. Lord de Freville wanted him to stay till your return for the wedding, but my father was in great pain and feverish, and wished him to come ; so, with his usual unselfishness, he came at once. He never said a word about religion to me, either since he came here or before, till I told him what I meant, asked him some questions, and insisted on having them answered."

Then she went on to say :—

"I know, to my great sorrow, that you will at first think me mistaken, perhaps presumptuous and self-confident, but I feel sure that sooner or later you will approve of my act, however much you may regret it. You know how deeply it must grieve me to do anything that is in any way displeasing or painful to you ; for I trust that I have always endeavoured to prove the reverence and affection which I never felt more strongly than now. Therefore I need hardly say, that if I had any other alternative than wilful disobedience to God,

nothing would make me act against your wishes. To be obliged to do so, with no alternative except that of obeying man rather than God, is a more severe trial than any one who has not been so tried could realise ; but I have one comfort as regards you, my dearest mother, a comfort that so many others in the same position have not. You may for a while think me mistaken, in the wrong, presumptuous, self-confident ; but you cannot think that I am following a false religion, or you would never have married my father. Do write as soon as possible, and let me feel that you have not and cannot misunderstand my motives or my feelings, especially towards you."

When she had finished the letter she put it into the post-bag and went to put on her riding-habit. At twelve o'clock she mounted the dark chestnut.

Their ride was not enlivened much by general conversation, for the penny catechism employed all the time till they had passed the Four ways and were within sight of Hazeley. Then there was a long silence, and finally, as they were turning into the Park, she said :—

"Tell me, why is it that you know so much more than other people?"

"I can't tell you why I do what I do not do," said Everard.

"Don't be so tiresome. You know what I mean, and you must know that what I say is true."

"Indeed I don't."

"Yes, you do ; but let that pass for the moment. What I wanted to say, just now, was that you explain about religion so satisfactorily, besides giving such a beautiful example."

"I do neither ; but if I know something about it, and if I act at all like a decent Christian, it is because I have had extraordinary advantages, though my mother died, as you know, when I was only three years old. I have only a dim recollection of her teaching me to make the sign of the cross ; but what she would have done if she had lived was carried out faithfully. Mrs. Roland is a very remarkable woman ; and if all Catholic children were brought up by women like her, we should not see the wretched specimens of nominally Catholic training that do more harm to the faith than any other impediment I know of in England.

Then, later on, I had a very exceptional advantage in Father Merivale, who is not only a model priest, but a man of varied knowledge and deep intuition. Besides, as you know, he is a Benedictine ; so that I have had the advantage of being trained, as it were, under the shadow of St. Benedict, and of studying as much of that marvellously perfect rule as an ordinary Christian in the world can aspire to. If I had not tried to do something, after all these advantages, I should be bad indeed."

"Yes ; but other people have advantages, and don't profit by them, and "——

"Stay a moment. I forgot to tell you of your father's note, which I have in my pocket. The penny catechism put it out of my head. He wants you to come and stay here with Mrs. Sherborne, instead of sending for Father Johnson, which might create an unpleasant feeling. I need say no more."

"And Mrs. Sherborne," said Elfrida, "has often asked me. In one respect I had rather not."

"You mean that your mother appeared to dislike your staying here, and therefore being obliged to go against her wishes in the one thing that has a higher claim on your obedience, you would, more particularly than ever, avoid seeming to do so in anything else."

"Yes ; how you read one's thoughts "——

"It was not difficult to read that, knowing your principles as well as I do. You are right in principle, of course. There can be no question about it, in the judgment of any one who has any idea at all of duty ; but your mother has not expressed any objection to your coming here, and as your father has now very strongly expressed a wish that you should, I don't see how you can hesitate. The arrangement happens to be prudent in every way ; but the way for you to look at it, as regards what you ought to do, is that your father wishes it. That should decide you."

Just then Sherborne cantered up and joined them.

"I am so glad you have come," said he, giving a rapid glance at the dark chestnut. That *is* a horse. Where did Sir Richard get him?"

"He is Everard's. Isn't he a beauty?" said Elfrida ; "and as good and well-behaved as he is beautiful. He is meant for Ida."

"She couldn't be better mounted, if he had searched all through England. I have lately got hold of a really good hack, which is the most difficult thing in the world to find. De Beaufoy spied him out one day, and told me of him—the day we rode over to Freville Chase and held sweet discourse about cathedrals with an Italian Marquis, who thought he had seen a function at Ledchester."

"And De Beaufoy," said Everard, "reduced it all to a minor canon and some choristers working away out of the Book of Common Prayer. It was my stepmother's brother."

"That man must have known very well what it was, by the look of it," said Elfrida.

Sherborne noticed the decisive tone of her voice, and turning instinctively, saw something very like a pout on her expressive mouth.

"You don't like him?" said he.

"No, I can't bear him; and I am sure you would not, if you saw more of him."

"I only saw him once. He appeared to me to be two men rolled into one, without being well mixed. The good and bad popped out at odd times, each on its own account. He reminded me, in a way, of a man I once knew, but have lost sight of, whose face had different meanings on the two sides of it; only the contradiction didn't seem to sit so comfortably on the Marquis Moncalvo as it did on my doubled-faced friend. How is Sir Richard going on?"

"Very well now, thank you. But only think of a grown-up man shooting just where he was and (the keeper says) less than twenty yards from him!"

"He shouldn't be allowed to have a gun."

"I don't know that he has. My father was shot with one of his own—which was too hard."

"You must ask Mrs. Atherstone about him. I believe she bullied the poor fellow out of his life at Bramscote, and puzzled him too—which was not the worse for his improvement."

"We have been talking so agreeably," said Everard, "that I was forgetting to give you Sir Richard's note. Here it is."

Sherborne read the note and said:—

"This is a very great pleasure; and we have been deprived of it so long. When will you come?"

Elfrida looked at Everard, who suggested in a whisper, "This day week." She answered accordingly, and the day was fixed.

They were now at the house. Elfrida dismounted, and Everard led the dark chestnut to the stables. As he left the stable-yard Sherborne said:—

"I am glad we took the horses ourselves, for I wanted to tell you a thing you ought to know."

Everard turned very pale, and the smile that no one saw without feeling its attraction stiffened into fixed lines that simply expressed indomitable courage.

"There is nothing the matter," added Sherborne quickly, "and perhaps you know it already; but letters are often a long while on the road when people are moving about. I believe I had better have left it alone."

"I am sure that you have a good and kind reason for speaking," said Everard. "What is it?"

"Don't let the abruptness of the answer make the thing seem more than it is," said Sherborne.

"What is it?" repeated Everard, standing quite still in front of him, and unconsciously grasping his riding-stick with both hands, twisting it to and fro as far as it would bend.

"My cousin Exmore, (the eldest) knowing no better, gave himself leave to propose to Miss Dytchley."

Everard made no reply, but the riding-stick broke in two, as if it had been a dry twig, and his eyes flashed forth a light never before seen in them, a light that seemed to say for him, in its mute expressiveness, "If I were to let nature fail in its obedience to Grace, I should be dangerous."

"He must have been deceived about it somehow," said Sherborne, "for he is a very honourable man."

"So I thought. I don't understand how it could be."

"However it may have been, he was so snubbed for his pains that he went off by the first train, and Lady Oxborough bundled away, with her two daughters, as soon as the millinery could be got into the boxes. My wife heard of it from her sister, Winifred de Bergerac, who was there."

"But what could have made him think of it? What a fool he must be—I beg your pardon—to put himself into such a position."

"Well, no: he's not a fool: he is a very sensible fellow. And that is what makes me sure that he was led astray about it. You know what Lady Dytechley is, and I have known her since I was a small boy. She has certain prejudices and a diplomatic imagination, and she doesn't understand you at all. It is more than probable that she deceived herself and him, without exactly intending it, and ran the chance of what might turn up. I have put myself into an awkward position by volunteering to speak on such a matter, for you will naturally ask yourself what business it is of mine"——

"To do a kind and friendly act? I was just going to thank you for it. Of course what you suggested, to account for this extraordinary occurrence, must be very painful to me, considering who Lady Dytechley is; but it would be sheer humbug in me to pretend that it isn't as you say, when I know that it is so, and know that you know her as well as I do."

"My reason for telling you what has happened," said Sherborne, "was that I thought you might possibly hear a wrong version of it before you heard the right one; for half-true reports are generally beforehand."

"It was very friendly of you to tell me," said Everard, casting a penitent glance at the broken riding-stick, "and all the more so because it was a disagreeable thing to do."

They then went into the house.

"I am sorry to say," said Sherborne, as they went, "that your old friend, De Beaufoy, and his charming wife left us yesterday; but you will find Mrs. Atherstone, who I must say, is worth meeting."

By this time they were in the library, and Mrs. Atherstone followed them immediately afterwards.

"Freville wants to hear what you said to the discreet convert you met at Bramscote," said Sherborne.

"There is remarkably little to tell," answered Mrs. Atherstone. "He talked nonsense, and I took the privilege of an old woman to tell him so as civilly as I could."

"I daresay most of us kick over the traces a little before we are used to it," said Sherborne.

"You never did," said Mrs. Sherborne. "So don't make your public confession of it before me."

"I am sure he never did and never would," said Everard;

but there is a great deal to be said for the '*enfant terrible*,' whose name nobody seems to remember. Balance of mind is perhaps the rarest quality to be found, and it isn't fair to expect in every convert what one seldom sees in any one."

"You are quite right," said Mrs. Atherstone; "and when one comes into the Church out of—no matter what, one wants extra ballast to keep one's newly born sense of freedom within the bounds of sobriety. Plenty after starvation must always be a trial to judgment and self-control."

"Besides that," said Everard, "the effort of taking such an awfully important step, at the sacrifice of so much—of everything indeed, sometimes—naturally inclines a person to zeal, rather than discretion, at first. What surprises me is that converts find their level as well as they do, considering what they have to get rid of and the confusion of tongues all round them, in these days of perpetual motion."

"I know that I have been immensely edified by a convert," said Mrs. Sherborne—"this husband of mine, who was going to make himself out, I don't know what, if I had let him."

"When I think," said Everard, "of the difficulties and struggles and sacrifices through which converts have found their way where I was placed by the accident of birth, without any act of my own, I ask myself what I should have done if I had been in their position, and, as I can give no answer, except that I don't know, I feel very small."

"As if the first step were everything, and one's whole life nothing," interrupted Elfrida, who till now had been silent and rather reserved. "If you could only be made to compare other people with yourself as you are, and not as you make yourself out to be" —

"That's right," said Mrs. Sherborne. "Reginald is as bad, and if I didn't call him all sorts of names, he would persuade people to think of him as he does himself."

"I have no doubt he deserved all the names, and was much the better for them," said Everard; "but what have I done? How can I be so presumptuous as to feel sure that I should have found my way into the Church if I had been brought up out of it? Now, I can show you, without leaving this room, a young lady just out of the school-room, who has done so, who began to inquire and make up her mind to go through with it before she had spoken a word to any one on

the subject, and who called me all sorts of names for not answering her inquiries as quickly as she expected."

"And who," said Sherborne, turning to his wife and putting Sir Richard's note into her hand, "has promised, I am proud to say, that she will make her first Communion here."

At this moment luncheon was announced.

"You have brought with you the only news that could increase the pleasure your visit will give us both," said Mrs. Sherborne to Elfrida as they rose to go into the dining-room.

"Very well and gracefully said, and just enough," thought Mrs. Atherstone. "That will do for everybody."

As they were people of tact it did for everybody. The conversation changed by tacit consent and without exaggeration, may be said to have been kept up brilliantly till, about an hour after luncheon, the horses were brought to the door.

"I am very sorry you have to go so soon," said Mrs. Atherstone, who had been studying Everard intently all the time and was thoroughly satisfied with the result.

"You see, poor Sir Richard is laid up," said Everard.

"Serves him right," said she in an undertone to herself.

"You must look at the new horse, all of you," said Sherborne, as they were walking to the door. "He is worth looking at, I can tell you."

"And that beautiful, gentle creature is to be for your wife only," said Mrs. Atherstone.

"Yes. That is to be his occupation," answered Everard.

"You must have worked hard to find such a horse."

"I did; but I didn't find him after all. My dear old coachman" (here he put Elfrida up and settled her habit), "whose judgment about a horse is as sound as his Catholicity, found him out."

"And she will have the advantage of going about with you—you, just as you are, and not any one else, instead of being with you at intervals' as the fashion is."

"The advantage is mine. The country about Freville Chase is made for riding, and, in many parts, is bad for driving. I object strongly to the idea of going out alone and leaving Ida in the flower garden, picking the dead leaves off the rose bushes."

Everard was now in the saddle. Mrs. Atherstone looked

at him for a moment, as one who had read him through, and was contemplating what she had read.

"Well, good bye," she said. "Think sometimes of a poor old woman in your prayers."

"Miss Dytechley will be, or ought to be, the happiest of women, if all goes right," said she, as Everard and Elfrida rode off. *If* all goes right," she repeated after a pause. "I *hope* it will."

"Why not?" said Sherborne. "The marriage has only been put off because Lady Dytechley ate too much *suprême de volaille* at Bramscote, on a hot evening and, being bilious, got out of temper, and being out of temper, thought herself ill, and thinking herself ill, made the doctor think that he had better order her abroad. There must be an end to that soon, and, as for attempting anything further—ask Exmore how he liked it when he proposed."

"No doubt," said Mrs. Atherstone, "she snubbed him without measure or mercy: it would have been strange indeed if she had not. There is no reason, that I can see, why everything should not turn out as well as possible. I had no reason at all for laying stress on the 'if,' but only a kind of feeling, or perhaps a sentimental superstition that I ought to have been ashamed of allowing, and that I can't account for or explain, except by my having lived so long at the Four Ways by myself, dreaming over the sad experiences of my own early life and reading a great many books of all sorts, good, bad and (worst of all) indifferent, without discretion or guidance. But I must go in, for I want to go out."

Everard and Elfrida were, at the time, on their way to Bramscote, devoting their time, as before, to the penny catechism. Sir Roger was not at home when they arrived there, and they went on, continuing the course of instruction till they dismounted at Netherwood. Elfrida then noticed that Everard had neither whip nor stick in his hand and asked the reason why. He changed colour and said:—

"It came in two somehow in my hands. I heard that Exmore had—(it wasn't his fault, I believe, but he did—) do you understand?"

"Yes. I hope she snubbed him tremendously."

"She did, and they all packed up their traps at once and made off."

"But what could have made him think that he might?"

Everard made no reply. Elfrida understood the meaning of his silence too well, and she asked no further questions.

"And now you see," said he, as they came into the house, "how much the self-control that you credit me with is really worth."

He said this to rouse her from a painful conflict, in which justice was at war with filial reverence. She rose to the bait immediately.

"What do you mean?" she said. "When did you lose your self-control, I should like to know?"

"I did though, or how could that strong cane have broken while I had it in my hands? It couldn't do so of itself."

"Simply because your feelings and the self-control that made you speak plainly (don't tell me you didn't) were stronger and harder to manage than the cane. I *do* know what you are, and you mustn't provoke me to scold and call you names, as I shall, if you try to make out that you were not in the right. I won't stand it. You will only put me out of temper, and you will be answerable for it by provocation, as the catechism says. You shouldn't have taught me that, if you meant to talk in this way. Doesn't the breaking of the stick show how much you had to control, and what an effort you made to control it? And what would you think of yourself, if you had found nothing to control after what you heard? One would think you had broken the man's head."

"Perhaps I might, if he had been near," said Everard dreamily, as he opened the door into the hall. "Life is a great struggle, it seems to me."

They found Sir Richard in high spirits over the idea of transferring the responsibility of Elfrida's first communion to Sherborne, who would value it. He told her all the anecdotes he could remember, and even took pleasure in describing, for the twentieth time, how the red-whiskered man had missed every shot except the last and biggest. This lasted till seven o'clock, when Everard went into his room to dress for dinner. On the writing-table were two letters, just brought in, from the second delivery, by a groom who had been sent for fish or some other articles of domestic use.

One was from Ida, the other from Lady Dytchley. They had, of course, been directed to Freville Chase and re-directed to Beynham, "which makes three days difference," he thought, as he tore open the envelope of Ida's with unrestrained eagerness. It was long: three sheets were filled with expressions of her intense desire to come home and her belief that they would be at home by the middle of October. She made no direct allusion to the proposal, but only said that she had been much annoyed by something which had just occurred, and wanted to tell him about it, but was afraid of committing it to the post.

"Only three weeks and then a few days," he thought, as he put the letter gently into its envelope and locked it up. Then he opened Lady Dytchley's note and read as follows:—

"My dear Everard,—

"It really is too provoking to be obliged to disappoint you again, and I am sure it has worried me beyond everything, and kept me awake all last night and upset me altogether, and I seem to be followed by one thing and another to do away with the good of our stay at this lovely place, which had set me up wonderfully, and I did hope and believe we should be at Netherwood by the middle of October, and had written to order everything to be got ready that you might not be kept waiting after it all, and now this comes upon me! You must know that poor Mr. Exmore fell into a very unfortunate mistake. He has been away so much you know, that it really is not at all surprising his not knowing how matters stood, and he unfortunately for us all proposed to Ida, and she poor dear child! was so vexed and angry that she is quite ill, only she will not I am sure say anything to you about it till she sees you, for fear of giving you pain, but she really is so completely upset, though I know she will try to make it appear that she is well for your sake, that I have been obliged after the best advice to give her change of scene, so that we may be detained longer than I told you in my last letter but as short a time as possible. I will write soon and tell you how we are getting on. You must not be cast down by this contretemps, for only think of all the worry it is to me! I can assure you I have no wish to stay abroad a moment longer than I can help, and shall be thankful to come home, and will certainly

come as soon as I can do so prudently, What a dreadful accident! I wish I had never asked that horrid man. Have you been at Netherwood since? But I am sure you have and done everything that is most kind.

"Yours affectionately,

"Charlotte Dythchley.

"P.S.—Just as I was going to send my letter I heard that poor Mr. Exmore had gone away in such despair that Lady Oxborough was in the greatest uneasiness about him, and then it came upon me like a thunderbolt that I ought to have seen and prevented it, though how could I have imagined for a moment that he was not aware of it like everybody else? and I was made so ill by it that I was in bed two days and have only got up now to write this and send it off. The doctor, a very clever man says that the only thing to make me fit for coming home at the soonest possible time, is to have as much change of air and scene and as much distraction as I can, and Ida too who has been made much worse by it, of course, and so we are again thrown back, but I do trust not for long. One comfort is that there CAN be nothing more—and I DO wish we had not happened to join Lady Oxborough, which has been the cause of all this. But how could I have guessed that it would turn out so? We start for Venice the day after to-morrow, as neither Ida nor I have ever been there, and there is so much to see that it will do us more good in the way of driving this dreadful catastrophe out of our minds than anything else. I am terribly afraid that we may not be home in consequence of this coming as it has after all the rest till late in November, but you may depend on my returning as soon as ever I can. I will write again soon and hope to be able to give you better news, for I still cling to the belief that a little change will be found sufficient, so that after all we may be back not only sooner than I thought at first but within three or four weeks of the time I last named, and I still believe we shall, so don't worry yourself about it, do not I beg of you. It is very annoying, and I do feel for your disappointment and Ida's, but I really cannot help it. I am doing my best, do believe that, but I am sure you will. Please burn this scrawl as it would not be right to keep what I have been obliged to tell you about Mr. Exmore."

"I might have expected it," thought Everard; "for she never meant to come home as soon as she said, but only to smoothe over the got-up scene in the library: and this has given her the chance. Viewed as the last move, it is not so very much more to bear; and at least the dates will show Sir Richard that Elfrida had nothing to do with it."

He dressed and then took the letter to Sir Richard, who listened attentively to his remarks upon it, but seemed unable to understand that the further delay had been an accomplished fact in Lady Dytchley's mind before Elfrida had even begun to ask what the Catholic Church is. He shook his head slowly to and fro, rubbed the top of his right ear with a vigour to which there was no analogy in his habits, and said in an oracular tone :—

“ I always said there would be a doctor about.”

CHAPTER XVI.



SIR RICHARD'S mind opened gradually to the fact, that Lady Dytchley's intended visit to Venice, and other places unnamed had preceded the important ride to Freville Chase by at least seven days ; and when, on the appointed day, Elfrida was fairly on her road to Hazeley, bearing the present of half his responsibility, as an offering of graceful homage to Sherborne, his spirits rose with the occasion, till he felt so comfortable in his whole being, that he forthwith began to joke pleasantly about his accident, relating the circumstances again, with a running commentary on the manners and customs of the red-whiskered man. Elfrida, who had been making the fullest use of her strong intelligence and working at high pressure, was found to be so well instructed that she made her first communion three days after her arrival at Hazeley, where she remained a week. Sir Richard rejoiced much at what had taken place, and still more at being able to remember that the scene was not at Netherwood. When Elfrida returned he patted her head, felt as if his conscience had in some mysterious way or other been vicariously lightened, and hoping that he had contributed something to the result by proposing the visit to Hazeley, put off all further rejoicings to a future day.

A day or two afterwards he received a sudden, though expected shock in the shape of a letter from Lady Dytchley,

He opened the envelope in a delicate manner, as if afraid that it would explode. There was however nothing explosive there. It only contained the information that she could not possibly come home before the end of November. The reasons given were the same as before, but the style of writing was yet more diffuse and involved. He read it over two or three times, began again at the end, and then tried the middle.

"I can't make head or tail of it," said he to himself, "except that it can't have anything to do with Elfrida, for she doesn't allude to it. Her letter must have got to Baveno after they went away. What a kick-up there will be when she comes home. I think I shall go and stay with somebody till the day before the wedding—I shall be right before then—and go away again after it, for a bit. Why shouldn't I get hold of a doctor to recommend a change of air? I have been on this beastly sofa much longer than she was. I am sure I was 'born unto trouble,' as she said that evening. I don't know about sparks flying upwards, but the shots flew point-blank at me pretty sharp, and here I've been, and here I am, like old Prometheus, ready to be pecked at. I am sorry for Everard, uncommonly sorry, but I shouldn't like at all to be come down upon here, whichever way the sparks may fly. I don't believe that Ida wants any change of scene at all, except to see Everard. It's all the fault of that double-distilled booby, sitting there on the rumble, grinning like a Cheshire cat, instead of coming inside like a gentleman, when I asked him. If it hadn't been for that, we shouldn't have had the row going home, and the doctor with a long face, and the smelling-bottle, and the sparks flying upwards, and the foolery over the settlements, and the starting off when she had asked them all to dinner, and Exmore making an ass of himself, and another doctor sending them further out of their road, and a row to come about everything."

As the greater part of this fervid complaint was thought aloud, Everard, having come into the room to say good-bye before going home on business for two days, could do no less than hear it. But he did something more: he formed on it an opinion and a resolve.

"The line taken or accidentally traced out," he said to himself, "has been just what his fears have excited him to

detail. I am afraid that Lady Dytchley is playing false, though what her ulterior motive is I am unable to judge; but whatever it may be, there is a limit to it in justice, in right feeling and in duty. Since the first postponement she has promised me twice in writing to return by the middle of October for the marriage—and to-day is the sixth—then she put it off to the middle of November, and now she says ‘not before the end of November.’ I will not stand any more of this. That she may have nothing to complain of, I will remain quiet till the end of November, and then, if any further delay is attempted, we shall see which of us has the strongest will. To the world, but not to myself, I should be justified in acting now. She is Ida’s mother, and for Ida’s sake I must bear it till then—till the fact shall have been made evident that we had no right alternative. I shall wait till then, but not a day longer.”

“Well!” said Sir Richard, who had relapsed into his normal state of defensive optimism, “so you must be off home for a couple of days, eh? Quite right. Business must be done. But come back as soon as you can. Good bye. The dog-cart will be ready for you. Come back, and stay till they come back, won’t you?”

“The difficulty is,” said Everard, “that I shall be expecting Hubert Freville, for he was to come in November; and as this last—I really don’t know what to call it”—

“Nor I either,” said Sir Richard. “Do the best you can. Anyhow I shall hope to see you the day after to-morrow.”

The dogcart was at the door, Elfrida in the hall, waiting to see him as he went out.

“The day after to-morrow, then,” she said.

“If I can; but I am afraid that I may be detained. I must be off now, or it will be pitch dark before I get home. It’s nearly half-past five now. You will ride the new horse, I hope, while I am away.”

“Yes, and begin one of those books you lent me. I am ready for them now. Which of them shall it be?”

“The ‘Ecclesiastical Discourses,’ by Archbishop Ullathorne, then Bishop of Birmingham. But before you begin to read them all from the beginning, and then begin again, as you certainly will, read the three on Science and Wisdom. They were originally one lecture, I believe, delivered to the

clerics of his ecclesiastical seminary, 'and I can't show better what I think of your mind than by recommending you strongly to read them. I wouldn't do so to any other girl of seventeen that I am acquainted with, I can assure you. And always remember what he says in the first of his lectures on Science and Wisdom: '*The difference between a philosophic and an unphilosophic mind is this, that one thinks by principles, and the other loads itself with undigested details. A principle well gained and well applied is like a fixed star in the mind that illuminates many things.*' Read the first of the three now—get it well into your mind, and then tell me what impressions it has left there. One impression will be that you had no idea of being able to understand so much. I shall expect you to tell me, when I come back, what he says about light."

"I am afraid you will be disappointed in me," said Elfrida, following him to the door.

"Shall I? Why do you believe that, the postman will bring the letters to-morrow and the next day, and this day six months? Because he has never disappointed you—isn't that it?"

"Yes. I don't know of any other reason."

"Then why should I expect you to be stupid now for the first time?" answered Everard, as he sprang into the dog-cart and drove off.

The shadows of an October evening had closed round him and dimmed the outline of the horse's ears before he passed the turning to Chase End. He drove on slowly and pulled up at the gate leading to Charlotte Wilcox's cottage. "I may as well look her up," he thought, "and see how she gets on. I shall be too busy after to-day."

The bridle road was but just wide enough for a dogcart, and the grass on either side more than uneven. His progress was very slow, and the darkness had increased perceptibly when he came near the farmhouse, where he got out. Taking a short cut through the farmyard, where a sheepdog had a great mind to fly at him, but thought better of it, he crossed the little orchard and stopped at the cottage. He knocked, but no one came; knocked again and again with the same result. Lastly, he tried the door and found it unlocked. There was no one inside. One of the chairs lay on the ground, the table was out of its place,

and the lattice window hung by one hinge. At this moment his ears caught the sound of wheels in the lane. It was not the sound of a waggon, nor of a farmer's cart, yet no other kind of conveyance ever passed along it. He rushed out of the cottage, ran in the direction of the sound and, jumping down from the bank above, saw three men carrying a woman to the open door of a pair-horse fly.

"What are you doing here?" said he, pushing his way between two of them, and finding, as he had expected, that the woman was Charlotte Wilcox.

"What the devil is that to you?" answered the biggest, a singularly ill-looking ruffian, whilst another held a handkerchief round the struggling captive's mouth; and the third, who appeared to be the director of the proceedings, called out impatiently :—

"Come, be quick. Do you want to wait till the policeman comes this way? He knows both of you very well, I think."

While he was saying this, with a quick distinctness of articulation that suggested Italian birth more than his accent could betray it in these few words, a much quicker succession of images passed through Everard's mind.

"This is Moncalvo's man," he said to himself, "if I ever recognized any one. Moncalvo, who kept Ida's note, and is untrue to God and man, has sent this scoundrel to persecute a poor woman who knows too much about him, and beard me on my own ground.

"You get out of the way, or I'll see about you," said the biggest of the two ruffians, who had evidently been hired for the occasion by the man who had undertaken the enterprise.

"Do you mean to let go that woman, you blackguard?" said Everard.

The man replied by dropping his burden and coming towards him, while the other ruffian pushed Charlotte Wilcox into the fly. The driver sat still on his box, pretending to be half asleep, as in fact he was morally, having taken a soporific in the shape of a five-pound note with the promise of another at the conclusion of the affair. Everard drew back cautiously, waited till the big ruffian was within a convenient distance, and then "put in with his left." The man staggered, and paused for a while to swear, while the blood

trickled from his nose ; but before Everard could follow up his advantage, the other ruffian tried to close with him. Everard, whose blood was thoroughly up, made no attempt at defence, but simply hit out right and left, bringing his antagonist heavily to the ground. He had hardly done so, when the big ruffian, having sufficiently recovered from the effects of the blow, attacked him in front, while the head of the expedition tried to pinion his arms from behind. He swung himself round, threw his wily foe backwards on the stony lane, and sent both fists, with almost electric quickness, between the eyes of the giant who was rushing upon him.

. *‘ Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas
Immolat, et pœnam scelerato ex sanguine sumit.’*

muttered Everard, with a grim smile, as he looked on the prostrate ruffian and thought of Ida's note.

But his work was not done. The head man who had already picked himself up, again pushed Charlotte Wilcox into the fly and jumped in himself, telling the flyman to drive on as fast as possible. The fly had begun to move and the second ruffian was on his legs again, guarding the approach.

“Now, or never !” thought Everard. “There is no time for caution.” At the same moment he made a sudden spring at the man whose head was still singing its complaints of the recent blow, seized him by the neckcloth with a grasp of iron, threw him down, and shaking him to and fro, as a dog shakes a rat, said :—

“You scoundrel ! If you don't be quiet, I'll throttle you.”

“I will, Squire, I will, I say,” gasped the discomfited bully. “I've had enough of it, and only got five shillings and a quart for it all.”

Everard let him go, and ran after the fly, which, notwithstanding the roughness of the road, was nearly a hundred yards off. The driver, disliking the aspect of affairs on his own account, pushed on as fast as the ruts and other natural inequalities of a farm-road would permit, and finding himself hard pressed, endeavoured to retard the pursuit by striking at the pursuer's face with his whip. Everard, who was on his guard against this likely style of warfare, avoided the blow and appropriating the weapon, made it convey a strong

persuasion to desist from further annoyance. He then stopped the horses, turned the fly across the road, with the horses' heads against a bank, and opening the door, collared the man inside.

"Be quick!—I will make room for you," he said to the captive, pulling the man out and giving him a monitory shake.

Charlotte Wilcox descended slowly, almost paralysed with terror; but the end of her troubles had come. The two fighting ruffians had made off across the fields, the driver was rubbing his cheek, over which the lash of his own whip had been neatly laid, and the chief rascal was imploring in several languages to be let off.

"I can't, you blackguard," said Everard, dragging him away several yards and suddenly propelling him the other way by a vigorous kick that sent him back to the carriage door. The man took the hint and scrambled in, while the fly-driver put his horses into a hard gallop, regardless of ruts and darkness.

"*Hic castus artemque, repono*, I hope," thought Everard: "only I never had occasion to practise the noble art of self-defence before in earnest. There they go, and there let them go! There was nothing for it but to give him the chance of a good kick to scramble away by, or bring him before the bench and bring forward a horrible scandal about my father's brother-in-law; for no one else could have any interest in kidnapping her, and I feel almost sure that was Moncalvo's servant, in spite of his disguise. But what am I to do with her now?"

Charlotte Wilcox answered the question in a manner that left him no choice.

"Oh sir! Mr. Everard, you won't leave me at the cottage for these wicked creatures to come again as soon as you are gone? Do, for pity's sake, take me to Freville Chase to-night, and I will"——

"Don't be frightened," said Everard, with a gentleness of voice and manner that reassured her even more than his words. "I will take you to Freville Chase. All I bargain for is that you stay there openly, not hidden up in the tower. You had better stop at the cottage as we go by, to put on a cloak, or something of the sort, and a bonnet or hat."

"What can I ever do, Mr. Everard, to show my gratitude for all your kindness?" said she, as they were walking towards the cottage. "I can do nothing except work, but I will work at anything. Do, sir, let them set me to any sort of hard work."

"Indeed, I will do nothing of the kind," he said. "You must rest after all you have gone through this evening. Besides, I can't forget that I am in a manner responsible for all this. Your troubles have come upon you through your having been entrusted with the care of my baby brother, and this last affair would not have happened if I had really believed in the danger you told me of. You have every right to my protection, and I am very glad to be of any use to you. You may rest assured that you will be welcome."

"I will, Mr. Everard: I know your kindness so well. And see what you have done for me! There must have been a dozen of them at least, and you knocked them all down, one after the other, and made them all run away, except the one you kicked right into the fly—and he was that wicked servant I told you of before. But are you sure that you are not hurt?"

"Not at all: I was not hit. But the dozen men were only two. The other was of very little account, and the flyman only wanted to take care of himself."

"But, Mr. Everard, only think of your doing all that to help a poor forlorn creature like me! and who could ever have thought you would be there!"

"It was very simple. I called at the cottage, on my way from Netherwood, saw that something was wrong, and heard a carriage in the lane. Here we are at the cottage. Get a bonnet and shawl, or something."

She went in, and presently reappearing, walked on, repeating her assertion that he had knocked down at least a dozen men. As soon as they could distinguish the dogcart moving slowly along the bridle road, he stopped and said:—

"Whatever you do, don't say a word, about what has happened this evening, to any one but Mrs. Roland. It is bad enough to be driven to suspect my father's brother-in-law of such a deed, without having it told all over the country."

"O Mr. Everard! I hope you don't think I could" —

"Not intentionally, I am sure; but you can't be too cautious. A word or a look might be enough, if anything had got about; and something is sure to get about, in some way or other. Somebody, you may be sure, either heard the row, or saw the two men making off; and somebody else wondered what the fly was doing in such a place; and somebody else will wonder why you have left the cottage, and the old women in Chase End will put two and two together. That is sure to happen, and you are the only person who can put them off the track."

"That I will, sir," said she. "I can easily say it was your kindness, because I felt so lonely there—which is as true as gospel, I am sure. I put the lattice back on its hinges, before I came away, and brought the key in my pocket."

She then mounted into the hind seat of the dogcart, where she began at once to practise her discretion on the groom, telling him that the Squire had "been so kind (and just like him) as to fetch her away from her cottage, because she was frightened at being all alone, with nobody near, and no labourer with his family to lodge there and be a protection."

It was now pitch-dark, and they had to make their way very slowly, by the narrow bridle-path, back into the road. About eight o'clock they arrived at Freville Chase, and Everard, transferring his charge to Mrs. Roland, went into dinner.

Whilst he was devoting his time to what the old evangelicals used to call creature comforts, the heroine of the plot was giving a graphic, not to say exaggerated description of the combat, for the information of the only person entitled to hear it. Mrs. Roland listened with condescending dignity, and showed no surprise at the number of men knocked into the next parish by the Squire, though they had, by this time, become fifteen or sixteen. In the meanwhile Anne the housemaid, having privately compared the mysterious arrival of Charlotte Wilcox with the light in the tower and the appearances of foreigners without names, was saying to herself at intervals:—

"They may talk as they please, but I know he murdered the baby, and will be up to something now—I know he will. He had ought to have been took up, as I said."



CHAPTER XVII.

..... "Be not over exquisite
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils."

—COMUS.



ETHER these lines, or their equivalent in the practical prose of every-day life, occurred to Everard in the early dawn, when he remembered, between sleeping and waking, that charity and the traditional customs of Freville Chase had forced upon him, for an indefinite time, the half-responsible charge of a woman who was apparently

Troubled with thick-coming fancies,

and who, while sincerely professing unbounded respect for the family, maintained without ceasing that his father's brother-in-law had committed unjustifiable homicide, after the fashion of King John.

"Well! I can't help it," he thought, as the story of the Marquis and the nurse passed in quick review, with all its dramatic incidents, including the fight in the lane. "I can't help it," he repeated aloud, opening his eyes, and sitting up in bed to contemplate the question. "But what a fool he must be—besides the cowardly ruffianism of the thing—to go and try it on in such a way as that, and set the risk of being found out in it against the improbable charges of an odd half-hysterical maid-servant and the gossip of a remote village. I shall write to him and tell him that she is here, and that I have been obliged to protect her after the—&c., &c., &c.—I shall put that very plainly—which

has almost frightened her out of her senses. He can make what he likes out of that ; but I think he will take the hint and keep away from here, without forcing me to say in so many words that I don't mean to see him."

Having settled that point Everard jumped out of bed, declining to enter upon the "uncertain evils" of knowing too much and too little about a man who might possibly be or become unscrupulous.

The business he had come home to do was finished in two days ; and then, after writing to Hubert, asking him to come as early as possible in November, he returned to Netherwood, where he found that the news of his exploit in the lane had preceded him. How it became known is a mystery ; for Charlotte Wilcox was faithful to her promise of keeping silence, and neither the head man, nor the driver, nor the two ill-fated roughs who had been so roughly handled and only got five shillings and a quart for it, were likely to be loquacious on the subject ; but known it was, after the loose manner of such reports, with various readings and marvellous additions. He heard of it first from the coachman, next from the head keeper, then from the woman at the lodge, and afterwards from various people about the place. They all spoke of it with pride and felt a personal interest in the story. It reached Elfrida's ears at last, but not till a week after his return.

"Why have you never told me of your adventure in the lane by Charlotte Wilcox's cottage all this time ?" said she, as they were going to Mass. "I heard of it just now by chance, and every one supposed that I knew it. Why wouldn't you tell me ?"

"We have been so busy with the Archbishop Ullathorne discourse on Science and Wisdom," said Everard, "and we have been taking such long rides and diving into so many deep subjects, that the little incident got itself hidden up in a corner, in spite of what may hang upon it, which is supposed to concern"——

"The Marquis Moncalvo, of course," interrupted Elfrida. "I knew it all the time."

"I am afraid he has something to do with it, but how much I don't know, and don't seem likely to know."

"Do tell me what really happened."

"I had a row with two vagabonds who were trying to

carry her off somewhere in a fly, and as they were slow, lumbering fellows, I had the advantage of them. That was all."

"That was not all ; but I can't expect the truth from you about yourself. In the first place, there were more than two."

"Only the driver, who did nothing—except that he cut at me once with his whip, which came out of his hand when I laid hold of it—and another fellow who strutted about and gave orders and collapsed as soon as he was tackled."

"A very amusing account," said Elfrida, "and just what I should have known you would say : but I must respectfully decline to believe it."

"Won't you take my word for its being strictly correct ?"

"No, I won't, though you taught me the catechism. I am ready to believe your figures, but not your facts. There may have been only three men besides the driver, but I am certain that it was not the trifling affair you describe."

"But I never said it was a trifling affair."

"No, but you so implied. Now tell me the truth."

"You are as bad as the old woman who wouldn't stand the flying fish at any price, but believed in the mountains of sugar and rivers of rum. All I can get the story up to, without telling lies about it, is that the two men were big powerful fellows, who would have been more than a match for me if they had known how to use their natural weapons, and that, owing to their incautious way of rushing, I had the best of it. The other was really of no account at all. He tried once to get hold of my arms from behind when I was looking out for an attack in front ; but he did me no harm. The whole affair didn't last three minutes."

"And you call it nothing—to get the better of two great savages together, with another helping from behind ?"

"Not together. They were up and down, like two buckets."

"One after the other then—two great savages rushing at you."

"Their rushing was my advantage ; for it converted their eyes and noses into targets, for me to practise upon without hindrance. That was how they were persuaded to retire."

"But are you sure you were not hurt in any way ?"

"Quite sure. I was never touched."

"Have you any idea who they were—who the head man was?"

"I am afraid I have: at least I have a strong suspicion. But here we are at the church-door."

"Promise me, then, to tell me all about it after Mass. I *must* know."

"Of course I will. I should have told you before; but you have kept me so close to the 'essentials,' that I haven't had a spare corner for it in my memory."

"They went into the church, and the question waited outside. When they had come out and were clear of the outgoing congregation, Elfrida said:—

"Who was the head man? Was it the Marquis Moncalvo?"

"No," said Everard: "he would have shown fight—at anyrate better than that fellow did. Besides, the man was not at all like him. I think it was his servant; but I can't be quite sure, for he was disguised."

"Where do you suppose he was going to take her?"

"There is the puzzle. How was he to get her out of the country? The only plan would be to have a yacht waiting off Peveridge Bay, which is about eleven miles from there; and then I don't see how he could get clear of the coast-guard."

"Worse and worse. He must have meant to murder her. I daresay he was a brigand before he was a servant."

"No: he doesn't look like a cut-throat. He may have had a boat a few miles further on, where the coast is flatter in places."

"Anyhow, his master must have sent him."

This end of the conversation, short as it may seem, took up their time, with pauses and interruptions, till they had reached home. Then they went up to see Sir Richard, who was rejoicing at the prospect of coming downstairs in a day or two, and then they went down to breakfast. The letters claimed their attention first, and kept it. Everard saw one from Ida, and before he could open it, another from the Marquis Moncalvo. There was one for Elfrida from Lady Dytechley. Everard ran his eyes over Ida's letter, to satisfy himself that all was right, and laying it down before him, opened the other; but he had not read many lines when Elfrida interrupted him.

"Look here!" she exclaimed. "What an immense comfort! You were right. My mother has had my letter, and this is what she says:—

*"I have but a few minutes to write, as we are just starting for Florence. My darling child, what would you have me say? Your letter was an awful shock to me of course, and so unexpected! *I never could have believed it of you, brought up as you have been and so sensible and right-minded as you used to be. I can hardly believe it now, and my only comfort is in the conviction that you will see your error by and by when you find out what the Romish religion really is, and not as it pretends to be to catch people. I should never dream of doubting your having acted conscientiously, I am sure you would always do that. And I am sure that Everard would act honourably about it and mean to do right. I impute no blame to either of you, I only lament the DREADFUL DELUSION you are under which has blinded you for a time. We shall be home (D.V.) by the end of November at latest. I am longing to be at home again and see you. Has your father left his room yet? How providential his escape was! It makes me shudder to think of it."*

"That will set your father's mind at rest," said Everard. "Now let me read out this other letter—or at least the important part of it. It completely exculpates him, if he is telling the truth.

"Who? the Marquis Moncalvo? I wouldn't believe him if, he kept on swearing from now till next Christmas that it was true."

"I can't go so far as that. He is not what he ought to be, and I shouldn't wonder if there were pages in his life that would not be at all edifying to read; but I am bound to say that he has been open with me. He spoke of Charlotte Wilcox's charge against him on the very first day of his visit, at the evident risk of my saying to myself, *Qui s'excuse s'accuse*. That was not like concealment. Then, again, he volunteered to make the disagreeable confession that he had taken the note and lost it, though he had no reason whatever to imagine that I suspected him."

"Yes, but he knew you must find it out."

"How? The only witness was a man who looks like a

gibbering idiot. He had no idea that Tim's facts are more to be relied on than most people's. And now listen to this:—

"I am listening with all my ears; but I don't believe a word of it, whatever it may be."

"Don't be so sure of that. Here is what he says:—

"I have just heard a thing that gives me more pain and annoyance than words can express. When I was at Freville Chase I asked you to make inquiries about Charlotte Wilcox, and you kindly did so, telling me that her father kept the village shop in Chase End. On my way to the station I made a detour, by which I nearly lost the train, and calling at the shop, I asked the man's wife to let me know as soon as she should be able to learn where her stepdaughter was. Soon afterwards she wrote to say that Charlotte Wilcox had returned, and that you had kindly placed her in one of your cottages. Feeling that it was my affair, not yours, I asked myself how I could best relieve you from so unfair a burden, and hearing that a cousin of mine, who is a great invalid, wanted a servant like her, I sent my servant (the same who was with me at Freville Chase) to England, with a letter for her and orders to escort her back if she should decide on going. This would seem to have been a very simple order, and one that left nothing to his discretion; but he contrived nevertheless to bring me, by means of it, into as painful and questionable a position as can be imagined. How the question was put before her, and what sort of an escort was sent, you know better than I do, having shown on that occasion qualities worthy of a Paladin—"

"Nonsense!" remarked Everard, turning to the next line.

"Well, he goes on to say:—

"But you probably did not recognise, through his disguise, the leader of the party—Yes, I did, and gave him a good kick for his pains.—That man was my servant, who came with me to Freville Chase; and you may imagine what I felt when he told me what he had done. And now that I have told you the fact, I must, in justice to him, explain the cause of his insane act. When he went to Chase End to inquire where she lived, he found that she had openly accused me of nothing less than murdering my own nephew, my dearest sister's child. I know very well that she had done so formerly, and I pitied her, for the delusion arose from her having been delirious through fever at the time; but he could only think of his master, and he was so

maddened by it that he lost all sense of right and wrong. He has been with me nearly all my life, and is the most faithful being I ever met with ; but he is as simple as a child, and any injury or affront to me blinds him to everything beside, so that he is like a madman for the time. I shall take good care never to send him anywhere again to say or do anything, for I see that when his feelings are excited, he is dangerous.

"I didn't find him so at all," thought Everard.

"Is there much more of this ?" said Elfrida. "The tea is getting cold."

"No, we are near the end of it. Here it is :—

"He thought that, if he could bring her among people who knew me well, she might gradually lose her delusion, or, at all events, could do no harm, and as he had travelled with me in wild, lawless countries, and has no idea of distinguishing one foreign country from another, he persuaded himself that this abominable outrage would be a meritorious and prudent method of enlightening her views and defending my good name. I have enlightened him in a more reasonable and effectual manner, and he begs me to express to you his sorrow for what he did.

"The tea is quite cold," interrupted Elfrida. "Do finish your breakfast, and read the rest of this tiresome letter afterwards. He reminds me of Henry II. and the murderers of St. Thomas of Canterbury. He gave his servant a hint, and the man took it."

The letter was laid aside till after breakfast, when Everard, who had been looking all the while at the outside of Ida's, and longing to disappear with it into a corner, read out again as follows :—

"If he had only done as I told him to do, and given my letter, she would now be in a place that would suit her exactly, with a lady who remembers her and who was a great friend of my aunt, with whom she lived so long. You would do me a great favour by explaining all this to her ; and if you could persuade her to accept the place that is offered, you would do a true work of charity, not only to her but to the lady, who has written to me again this morning, begging that I would do all I could to persuade her to come. Were it not for the intolerable outrage perpetrated in my name, she would have had the letter I sent ; and I am certain that she would have gladly accepted the place ; for she wanted to have it when my aunt

died, only then it was not vacant. Of course I can do nothing about it now; for naturally she must think that my servant was sent by me to do what he did, and I cannot blame her or any one for thinking so. But she has confidence in you.

"And so he wants you to be answerable for him," said Elfrida, gathering up her letters. "Pray don't do that."

"I can say that he may have had nothing to do with trying to carry her off," said Everard, "for I believe it; but I am not going to find servants for invalid ladies at the cost of poor Charlotte's peace of mind. Wait a moment, and hear the rest:—

"And I must ask you to take the trouble of explaining to her first how the thing happened"——

"With nothing but his word for the truth of the explanation," interrupted Elfrida, rising from her chair and walking about the room.

"How the thing happened," repeated Everard, reading on; "and then she will be able to look at the matter fairly. I hope that you will do your best to persuade her to take the place. By so doing you will not only benefit her, but will confer an immense personal favour on me. Imagine yourself for a moment in my position, and ask yourself how you would feel if you knew that a person, sane on every point but one, was going about in perfectly good faith telling people, as from her own personal knowledge, that you had murdered your own nephew. Would you not wish that person to be where you had friends who would laugh at the delusion and help to remove it, rather than among strangers who believed and repeated and spread it about?"

"Very pretty indeed!" said Elfrida, "and a very good imitation of truth. He ought to have been a lawyer. Now I really must go. I positively will not stand any more of it."

"You are as hard as the nether millstone," answered Everard, "not to pity the sorrows of a poor middle-aged man who assures you he couldn't help it.

E se non piangi, di che pianger suoli?

as the Conte Ugolino said to Dante. Won't you give me another cup of tea, after my reading all this out for your instruction? I really wasn't going to give you any more of it. The exculpatory part is ended."

"And doesn't exculpate him a bit from anything."

"But you surely don't believe in Charlotte Wilcox's wild story?"

"I didn't mean that: it would be too horrible. But don't tell me that the servant hired a carriage and two fighting savages to carry her off by force, without having been given to understand by his master that it would be acceptable. Of course he is sorry for it now, when the attempt has failed and the thing is known. Here is your tea—I am afraid you will find it quite cold. I hope you won't be long over the rest of that rubbish. I want you to come with me to my father, and help to explain that the letter I had this morning really *is* comforting. He will believe it if you say so, and it will comfort him very much."

Everard thereupon began reading to himself, and this is what he read:—

"But I have another and far stronger reason for urging, and (if I may venture to do so) advising that you should do all you can to persuade her to take the place. Perhaps you will think it an impertinence in me to offer advice at all. I shall be very sorry if you do; but if I were sure that you would, I must still give it. I cannot see you risking your character in a way that would be so ruinous to your prospects of happiness, without warning you of the danger. Other people besides myself must have seen a light in that part of the tower supposed to be uninhabited, but they could not guess, as I did, who it was. I implore you for your own sake, for Miss Dytechley's sake, to remove such a conspicuous occasion for evil reports. It is not pleasant to give advice unasked in so delicate a matter; but as I understand that she is again concealed in the house, I should not feel justified in closing my letter without fulfilling so obvious a duty towards my sister's stepson. . . ."

"You have overshot your mark, my worthy friend," thought Everard. "The peroration has spoilt it all. It was natural that you should try to persuade me to send Charlotte Wilcox away from a neighbourhood where she was likely to spread such unpleasant reports about you; but to put forward my interest as your strongest reason for wanting me to persuade her, is going a little too far. So he must have noticed the light in the tower before I did, and never mentioned it to me, but guessed why it was, and no doubt tried to find out more: and that was how Mrs. Roland saw him going into the tower one night. He forgets

that he told me a different story about this in the letter I received from him at Beynham. But what is this postscript about?

"*Kind regards to Sir Richard,*" and "*how is he getting on,*" and the rest, and——

"Are you coming?" said Elfrida.

"Give me one moment. There is news for you in the postscript."

"I don't want to hear it."

"Not about your friend the red-whiskered man?"

"What mischief has he been doing?" said she, walking off with her letters.

"None, I hope," answered Everard, putting his own letters in his pocket and following her out of the room.

"He is going to be married. But I read it in such haste and trepidation, with you scolding me all the time. I must show it to you presently, for the account is rather too long to get through on the way upstairs."

"But what made the man write about him?"

"The gun-trick, I suppose."

They were now at Sir Richard's door. Elfrida went in, to read Lady Dytchley's letter and show forth its comforting qualities. Everard followed as a support, but his persuasive assistance was not needed. Sir Richard was exceedingly comforted by it and said in the strictest confidence to himself:—

"I shall have no more of the smelling-bottle, and the doctor looking as if one had done something, and the arrangements turned upside down, and the 'sparks flying upwards.' I can't bear those sparks, they always mean a row."

He then talked and joked in his own mild and cautious fashion, on such a variety of subjects that it was half-past twelve o'clock before Everard could seize a fair opportunity of retiring with his two letters, which he was about to do when he heard a cheerful voice from the once ill-omened sofa, saying:—

"By the by, I wish you would ride into Lyneham this afternoon, and see Sharpstone about a bit of land he is in treaty about for me—four acres that run into my land by Grumley Gorse. I want you to stir him up: he has been such a time over it. Elfrida will like the ride, and if you

could manage to come home by Dripley and through the Ford, you might look at that young horse, up the road that goes by the mill on to Chillingale Heath. He belongs to a man who lives in a red-brick house with high chimneys. I forget his name, but I have seen him out hunting—a sort of half dealer—you know that sort of thing. I should be glad to hear what you think of him (the horse, I mean), and you might just get on him.”

“I know the man,” said Everard, hurrying to his room.

“Directly after luncheon, then.”

After he had read Ida's letter a sufficient number of times, there remained for writing to the Marquis Moncalvo just five minutes, which he employed in expressing his views and intentions. With regard to Charlotte Wilcox, he said :—

“I am sorry to disoblige you, but I cannot use my influence to persuade her to return to Italy, nor can I send her away. Looking at her past history, I can only see that she has a right to my protection as long as she claims it. That protection she shall have.”

“Certainly, ‘*in great haste*,’” he thought, as he signed his name, “with the bell ringing for luncheon, and the lawyer to stir up at Lyneham, and the roundabout way home by Dripley, and the horse to try, and the horse-dealing process to be gone through. I hope that I have expressed what I meant. I have scrawled over a whole sheet and part of another in my hurry. Stay, I had better take a copy of it, for fear of—mistakes. The letter is cold, but I meant that. Charlotte Wilcox's delusion is harmless, and I said so.”

But the old women in Chase End continued to believe that it was not a delusion, and the Marquis Moncalvo was quite sure that it was not harmless.





CHAPTER XVIII.



RAY, in his "Progress of Poetry," speaks of
Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn,

both being scattered from the friendly urn of bright-eyed Fancy. What business bright-eyed Fancy has with an urn, whether it contain the ashes of a dead pagan or hot water for a tea-pot, it is hard to say; but certainly there are occasions when thought seems to escape in the breathing of the thinker, and words leave an impression of vital heat, like the touch of a feverish hand.

Such an occasion was made with unintentional exactness by Lady Dytechley at Florence, three days afterwards, when, having laid down a letter, taken up some work, and heaved a sigh, she said in a dreamy voice to her self inclusively:—

"What a sad world this is!"

This was not the occasion, but only the way up to it. Ida, who had a modified and temporary belief in the statement, looked up for further information, fearing some practical example in the shape of retarded convalescence and more change of air.

"My dear, there is always some trouble, if one looks round," said Lady Dytechley in answer to the unspoken question. "But one must not worry oneself about"

"Oh! but what is it? I really can't bear anymore of this. I have nearly been driven out of my senses, as it is, by all I have gone through in the last two months."

"My poor child, you have indeed in—so many ways. And at the same time, too, which was so very provoking—I mean so unfortunate," said Lady Dytechley, sighing again and repressing the sigh suggestively. This was a delicate hint that Everard might as well have put off the definite

religion till the honeymoon or thereabouts, and Ida understood it in that sense; but before she could reply, Lady Dytchley repeated with emphasis and unction, "*so* unfortunate," adding, as if in a parenthesis, "not that I was referring to that or to anything you could have—exactly prevented"

"Prevented!—What could I have ever prevented?"

"No my dear. I didn't mean that you could. I only meant that I—was not thinking of you when I said there was always some trouble. It was foolish of me to refer to it at all."

"To what? If it doesn't concern me"——

"Well, it would be painful"——

"But what? Don't keep me in suspense."

"My dear child, there is nothing to alarm you. It was only the—that letter that mentioned—you know how broken-hearted poor Mr. Exmore is."

"Broken-hearted!—Nonsense—Rubbish—humbug!" exclaimed Ida, her eyes flashing fire for the first time in her life, while a flush of uncontrollable resentment mounted into her cheeks and, in a moment, gave place to a paleness that expressed her anger yet more strongly. "He ought to be ashamed of himself. It was the most disgraceful thing I ever heard of. He *must* have known about Everard. I shall tell his sisters what I think of it, the first time I see them."

"My dear! You mustn't think of doing that, whatever you do," said Lady Dytchley, colouring up to the roots of her hair and feeling an excessive degree of heat among the roots. "You *must* see that it would not be right or proper in any way."

"Why not?" said Ida. "He had no right to act so: he knew better. I ought not to bear it. I can't be expected to bear it. I have no right to bear it, and I won't bear it."

"But, my dear, just consider what you would be doing. It would make a quarrel and"——

"Only with me. I don't care whether they speak to me or not, nor what they do, or think, or say. It would be wrong to myself and to Everard if I were to take no notice of it. Who would believe that any man in the world would have done such a thing without some sort of encouragement?"

Lady Dytchley felt uncomfortable in her mind, and wished that she had not begun to moralise on the ubiquity of trouble. She had not read Gray's "Progress of Poetry," but Ida's last reply breathed and burned, though it was not scattered by fancy neither did it come out of an urn, friendly or otherwise.

There was silence for a while, emphatic and self-prolonging, successive rather than continuous, and stretching out like the shadowy line of kings before Macbeth. She remembered indeed that the sisters of the man who "would not have done such a thing without encouragement" were beyond speaking distance; but then there was the post, which commits people in a more lasting manner.

"How difficult things are!" she said at last, as if reasoning with herself. "How difficult it is to act wisely for another, and how much more difficult when that other is one's own child, and when one is most anxious to do for the best!"

"But how could there be any acting for the best or the worst, about that?" said Ida. "How could *you* have anything to do with it?"

"Well, you know, one has to do with things without meaning it," said Lady Dytchley, holding her words in readiness and the needle pointing to the spot where she had left off. "I think it must have happened through my over-scrupulous care—or fidget, if you like. I wouldn't for the world do anything to interfere with such an engagement as yours. I have always looked upon it as a settled thing. But I have known such misfortunes come from people thinking themselves bound by engagements they had not made themselves, that I thought it right to make yours your own, and I told Everard the last time I saw him, that I considered him perfectly free and disengaged—I mean, of course, while we were abroad—and therefore he *may* have—but you mustn't distress yourself—you really mustn't. If you had lived as long as I have, and been disenchanted as I have been! I am not complaining; I am only stating a fact which the experience of other women would confirm. We are all disenchanted, and no doubt it is better for us to be so."

"I am not disenchanted. I can't be disenchanted. I won't be disenchanted. What do you mean about Everard? He *may* have—what?"

"Well, he may have said something that led people to think the marriage had been broken off. People are so stupid, and make such mistakes."

"He never did, would, or could, have said anything of the kind; and whoever has said so has told the most false and wicked and abominable story that ever was invented."

"Nobody said that he did; but he might have mentioned what I told him to some one in confidence."

"No, he would not; for he never could have taken what you told him as anything but words, that pained him to hear but had nothing to do with him."

"He appeared to think that they *had* something to do with him," said Lady Dytchley, replacing her needle and beginning to work steadily.

"Why? How? What if he *did* think that a horrible suggestion meant some fresh trouble for him and me, after all we have had to bear? You are my mother, and I have always felt and shown the greatest love and respect and obedience to you; but you have nearly driven me out of my senses about Everard, and if you make any more difficulties"——

"Make? you surely ought to know that I have not made them. You know how it all happened."

"Yes, I do, too well; but duty keeps me silent. I say, that if you make any more difficulties, you will be sorry for what you have done when it is too late. I have heard these things, in one shape or another, from the day we left Netherwood—one thing after another, continually, without cessation, directly and indirectly, told, hinted, suggested, left to be inferred, and all pointing the same way, all with one evident object, all calculated—yes! there is no other word, unhappily—all calculated to loosen the tie that has bound me to him all my life, with your own consent and my father's, and now binds me more than ever, heart, soul, will, with all the strength that is in me. Nothing can, *nothing shall* loosen that tie. No power on earth shall induce me to break an engagement which you and my father made, which you have no right in justice or in prudence or in any way whatever to prevent, and which I have confirmed with the fullest consent of heart and soul. But you *may* wear me out, body and mind, by this continual pressure, this continual conflict of duties and obligations

and affections ; and you will do it if you go on as you have. The strain is too great, placed as I am, away from him, away from all (I *must* say it) all protection, hearing all day long the same maddening story in different shapes. Simon killed the Dauphin by giving him no rest, and I am being worn out—whether body or mind will go first I know not—by the same treatment. I am practically, to all intents and purposes, a prisoner while I am out of England, and as much at your mercy as he was at the mercy of Simon. The difference of intention will not affect the result. Now, at least, you know what you are doing. It is for you to decide whether you will continue to do it or not.”

Lady Dytchley decided that she would. Her temper, which had been enlisted in the cause, excited by a failure she would not accept, and embittered by Elfrida’s conversion, as well as by Ida’s open resistance, now became stiff and cold. She shut her mind against evidence, her heart against natural affection, and persuaded her conscience to “prophesy smooth things” of the object she had in view.

“I don’t think I have quite deserved all that,” she said, looking down closely at her work, “nor that it was right of you to think so and yet say nothing to me about it till now. I wouldn’t for the world say anything to give you pain, if I could avoid it without helping to bring worse upon you. You felt hurt, I could see, at what I said about Everard ; but how could I do otherwise, in justice to you and with any regard to truth ? I told him that I considered him disengaged—that was a fair trial of him, wasn’t it ? Well, he said nothing, nothing at all. Would you have me conceal *that* from you ? I am not giving any opinion or suggesting anything. I simply tell you what happened. You are old enough to judge for yourself. Now do let us talk of something else, or go and see something to distract your mind. I have enough anxieties, without having to feel that every word I say for your good is misconstrued.”

The conversation ended there and then. They neither of them talked of something else, nor went anywhere to see anything. Lady Dytchley was satisfied with her reply, thought it better to leave well alone, and having told the truth about Everard strictly, dismissed the suppressions, or, rather, left them to take care of themselves among worn out

scruples, whose edges had been smoothed away gradually since the occurrence of the tantrum in the family coach. Ida was not in a mood for talking on any subject. Those little poisonous words, "He said nothing, nothing at all," rankled in her heart, excited her will into a state of morbid restlessness, disturbed the balance of things in her mind. She rejected the inference against Everard passionately, and determined on the spot that, at any cost, she would not submit to further delay, however short; but the poisonous words had stirred up two questions that indignation would not silence:—

Why did he say nothing? and why did he take no notice of the note?

Lady Dytchley saw, perceived, guessed, inferred, speculated, and remained silent. The silence had lasted about three-quarters of an hour when the door opened, and the Marquis Moncalvo was announced.

Lady Dytchley, who was beginning to find the silence embarrassing, had no available means of shortening it, and would even have welcomed Sir Richard's little song, which had seemed so inopportune in the family coach, received him with evident marks of satisfaction. Ida, who was not aware of any cause for disliking his presence more than that of other people, and felt grateful to him for having shown, rather than expressed, much respectful sympathy, was disposed to think that he might as well be there as not. Moreover, she had become accustomed by degrees to his presence. He had been with them at Baveno, living in the same hotel, walking among the same vineyards, helping them to see what was most worth seeing, and since their arrival at Florence he had devoted part of every day to their service in the same way. She was used to meeting him frequently, and he had the great merit of never showing the slightest admiration. Altogether she was not otherwise than glad to see him there and then, particularly then, for the silence had grown oppressive and unmanageable. They talked about pictures and churches, within the limits of Lady Dytchley's general principles, till another visitor came. When he had gone about his business, if he had any to go about, Lady Dytchley remembered that a letter must be written before they went out, and Ida, having had enough of art strictly limited, retired to write. As soon as she was

out of the way Lady Dytechley, whose temper was up and stirring, began to unfold her grievances.

"It is hard, very hard," said she. "I haven't deserved it!"

"What has happened?" said the Marquis in a tone of broad sympathy. "Is there anything that I can do for you?"

"You are always so kind," said she, "and so large-minded, and see things in such a right way; but you can do nothing for me in this miserable affair, which has upset me more than anything that could have happened."

"I hope that you will be able to see it in a more favourable point of view," said the Marquis in a tone of tentative sympathy.

"I don't see how that can be," she said, "unless Elfrida changes her mind; and she won't do that, after having once got herself into it. They won't let her out when they have got her in. I know their ways."

"Pardon my stupidity. I cannot quite understand"—

"Not at all. You had not heard of it, and I oughtn't to have spoken of it in that way to you; only you are not like—like the rest of them. The fact is that Everard, who, as you must know, is as bigoted as he can be, has got hold of Elfrida and persuaded her to be a Roman Catholic. She pretends that she did it herself; but I know better. I know how those Ultramontanes teach people to deceive and give them indulgences to make it right. And then she tells me as an excuse that she was baptized in that way—as if that made any difference, when I have taught her everything since!"

The Marquis failed to see how Elfrida could have forfeited her baptismal rights by being deprived of them in her infancy, but not knowing how to reply without either rejecting Lady Dytechley's view of the case or putting off his religion more than he was prepared to do, he made a gesture of general sympathy and said nothing. Whatever his Catholicity might be in practice, he had not lost his faith, and if he allowed other people to speak against the Church before him without let or hindrance, he never did so himself.

Lady Dytechley ought to have observed this, and in fact had observed it: but when temper rules tact retires, and

she went on with her story, regardless of everything but the fancied grievances whose local habitation was at Freville Chase.

"I knew you would feel for me," she said, "and see how very hard it is." The Marquis knew that he did nothing of the kind, but he bowed again. "How very, *very* hard it is, to be treated so after all I have done for her, and Sir Richard (I *must* say) never interfering. And all this after he had done the same about Ida almost before my face, under the pretence of his being engaged to her, which I wish she never had been, and she shall *not* be now, whatever happens, I am determined. I have always hated this marriage; and now that he has defied me in this way, and deceived poor dear Elfrida, who *never, never, never*, gave me a moment's anxiety before, and destroyed her prospects and her happiness—for, of course, she won't marry a Protestant now, even if his uncle would allow it—just the match I could have wished most in every way, and just after he has made Ida refuse one of the best matches in England, and an admirable man too—quite a pattern—for the sake of this nonsensical engagement that I never could endure! He shall not marry Ida, whatever I have to do to prevent it. I say he shall not. I don't care what any one says, what the whole world thinks. I don't care what happens to me, I say she shall *not* marry him. But I needn't take that trouble. He is disgusting her enough by showing so plainly that he doesn't care for her. Why you yourself told me that he was in high spirits when he heard that we had gone away, and didn't care the least about finding her gone when he went to Netherwood, and"—

"Not exactly that," interposed the Marquis. "You asked me whether"—

"No, I didn't, and I won't have it made out so, when you know better. She is getting disgusted with him, and I want you to help me to make her feel it more."

"Pardon me, dear Lady Dytechley," said the Marquis, turning pale and fixing his eyes on the ground. "I cannot do that. I am ready to do anything for you that a man of honour can do; but you will see, I am sure, on reflection, that what you ask is impossible."

"I don't see it at all, and I think it very unkind of you."

"I think you will see it, if you consider the case dis-

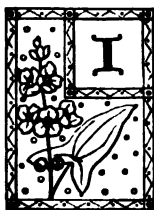
passionately. Shall I put it before you as it would appear to every one?"

"For goodness' sake, no! If you won't, you won't. But I daresay you are right, in a way. It doesn't matter. He is cutting his own throat by his conduct and everything. She is finding him out, I tell you. Would you try to prevent her? There now! Don't say any more about it. I won't hear anything in his favour or in favour of the marriage, nor any nonsense about engagements and all the rest."

At this moment a parcel was brought in, and soon afterwards Ida reappeared. The Marquis remained a few minutes and then went away, meditating much on what Lady Dythchley had confided to him when her temper was up.

CHAPTER XIX.

Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen.—PARADISE LOST.



IF the Devil said this to the rebel angels, as Milton says he did—and Milton ought to know something about the hero of his own greatest poem—he must have felt satisfied, after his fashion, as to the tempting properties of the advice; for he has repeated it ever since, whenever he could find any one disposed by circumstances and a disordered will to receive the same.

It seemed that the Marquis Moncalvo was listening to suggestions of this kind between ten and eleven o'clock the next morning, if we may judge by what he said to himself in reference to Everard's letter, which had arrived by that morning's post, and which he had just read. He opened his mind to himself thus:—

"So it is, and so it must be! Will it ever end, except with my own wasted life? One false step has led to another, and the way back is closed. Everard Freville has closed it.

Had I but listened to my good and wise sister, and barred my soul against the evil influence that is poisoning the youth of Italy wherever it can enter, I should now be in the grace of God, as I once was, and my life would not have been as I have found it to be, a dark dream, with just sufficient light here and there to mark the extent of the darkness. Yet I had not quite abandoned hope ; and after I had been at Freville Chase, a way of escape opened out before me—a way that would have injured no one. Everard Freville might have opened the way, but he would not. He has made me feel more acutely what I have lost, and long to regain it, but he will not save me. He might have been the means of reconciling me to the Church eventually, by helping me to save my reputation now : but he has refused to do so. Instead of helping me to reach the only way of escape, he has set an impassable barrier before the entrance. He had it in his power to save a reputation and a soul, by allowing me to place that woman where she would be harmless ; but he would not. And now I must go on to the end—whatever and whenever it may be—hopeless, reckless, despising myself, hating the whole human race for the sake of those who have ruined me in this world and for the next. Hating all ? No ! It were better if I could ; for that one exception is driving me to an act of black treachery. Treachery ? To whom ? What do I owe to *him*—to the man who has refused to save me, who has closed the way back, who has made penitence impossible ? He *must* have known what he was doing, for I expressed it so strongly—I almost begged him to do it. He *did* know. He does know. But then he is so nearly connected with me, and I have felt and do feel, even now, the wonderful attraction of the most perfect character that I have ever known in a man of the world. I know it well. I know what he is. I know it all—all that will, that must be ; but I seem fated to wrong all whom I love or venerate or wish to serve. So it is, and so it must be, and so it *shall* be ; he has told me so in his letter. He is a saint in the midst of the world, with power and genius and passions that would have led any other man to be of the world. I know that ; but he has driven me to this—I say, driven me. What has right and wrong to do with me now ? He is strong, and can defend himself : he is saintly, and he can bear what I cannot resist.

If he is a saint, *orel pro nobis* ! This letter has torn us apart, as I tear the paper it is written on."

He tore the letter down the middle with such violence that the two halves were divided, as by a paper-knife, and remained separately in each hand, so that he could not at once destroy the whole.

"It is well !" he said. "I shall want to read it again—often, perhaps—to remind me that he had the power to save me and would not. I will keep it about me, in token of having cast myself loose from every obligation whatever towards him—every possible obligation."

He then put the letter into the tail-pocket of his frock-coat, and went out, saying as he went :—

"What can I find to show them to day ? They have seen all the pictures, and Lady Dytechley would rather see anything than a Catholic Church—and so would I now. I feel there like a man exiled from his father's house. Exiled—by whom ! Finally by Everard Freville. Here is his letter. Must I take it out of my pocket every minute, to remind me that he might have saved me and would not ?"

In this frame of mind he continued to affirm false conclusions from false premises for the space of an hour and a half, when he returned home and did likewise till past two o'clock. He then went out again, to call on Lady Dytechley, repeating to himself, "He might have saved me, and would not," till he entered the room where Lady Dytechley had opened her heart and suggested to his mind possibilities that certainly had not entered into her own.

She was not in the room, nor was Ida there. A letter was on the table, ready to be posted. It was from her to Everard. He took it in his hand, looked at the handwriting for an instant, and threw it down.

"If I could be good, or thoroughly bad !" he thought.

"But something seems to hold me back from being the one, and how can I be the other now ? The time for that is past, irrevocably past. I cannot retreat now. The good that clings to me yet—I know not how—and the evil that is making me its own, together forbid it. I cannot. I will not. Will not ? I have no will now, in the true sense of the word. It is too late, too late."

"Yes, I am afraid it is, unless we start directly," said Lady Dytechley, who had overheard the last words as she

entered the room. "Where did you think of going to-day?"

"I must apologise for coming so late," he said, with a smile that had some of its old charm, but was too evidently unfelt within to exercise its former influence. Lady Dytchley, however, was not in a humour to notice the difference, nor did she want to go anywhere, except for the purpose of filling up time and interrupting the course of Ida's thoughts.

"I have had enough of pictures for the present," said she.

"Yes, one is confused by so many. One requires to wait and see them again, two or three at a time."

"Well, to say the truth, I am tired of them. How can I enjoy such things, worried as I am? And the churches are worse, for it was all that sort of thing that put it into their heads to marry Ida to Everard Freville (but it shall *not* be), and set Elfrida up to think she must do the same."

"Perhaps you would like to drive out into the country," suggested the Marquis. "There are many" —

"Yes, yes—by all means: you are always so kind and thoughtful. We might go at three, or half-past."

"Shall I order the carriage then?" said he.

"Thank you, so much; but I need not trouble you to do that."

"It will be no trouble at all. Can I do anything else for you?"

"Yes: there is that letter on the table. I hate the sight of it, and it *must* go. Do take it away. They ought to have posted it, and forgot, of course, just because it annoys me so. But, about the carriage, I think we might as well start sooner. I am so tired of sitting here, and the day is so very fine. Would it suit you to go in half-an-hour. Here is the thing."

In catching the letter up to put it into his hand, she knocked a small vase of flowers down. The Marquis quietly took out his pocket-handkerchief, wiped from the table two or three drops of water that had been spilled, and went to order the carriage.

"He sees that I am right," affirmed Lady Dytchley to herself; "and he is a man of the world. His opinion is a good test of what the world will think. I knew it was so; only people are so interfering."

"Sir Richard must have had a taste of purgatory, (I think) before his time," thought the Marquis. "It is well for him, and well for me too. Well for me? Yes! It may, it must save me in spite of Everard Freville. How can a soul that loves as I love be shut out finally from the Church? It must save me in spite of him. Why should I have scruples about him, when he has had none about me? He has done his best to drive me to despair. Am I to renounce my only hope for his sake? He has refused to do for me what he *could* have done. Am I to ruin myself for ever by attempting for him what I *cannot* do? I have no power to help him. Whatever I say or do, she is not to be allowed to marry him. Her mother says so, said it over and over again. I am therefore doing him no harm. It has been coming to this ever since Lady Dytechley stopped the signing of the marriage settlements. One thing after another has been done by her in the same sense, and has not been resisted by—by either. If he had loved her, and if she had—accused be the idea!—She does not, she does not. Lady Dytechley told me so. There is no tie between them, except the idea that they ought to love one another, because their two fathers wished them to do so. Am I then to sacrifice everything for that? Everything? Yes! everything; for by that connection Charlotte Wilcox's stories would be made innocuous in the only neighbourhood from which they could spread. It would then be their wish as well as mine to hush up the thing: and by that fulfilling of the immense human love that has never before met its true object, I shall have taken the first step back towards the faith, which I have so long neglected but never lost."

He ordered the carriage and thought of Ida's letter.

"I can post that afterwards," he thought, and turned back, repeating his conclusions till he was on the staircase that led up to Lady Dytechley's apartment, when he suddenly remembered that in his fit of hopefulness, he had forgotten the most important element of success. Assuming that his passionate reasoning was sound hypothetically, what would Ida say to it in practice? He turned deadly pale, said to himself, "It is my only hope," and went on.

When he entered the room Lady Dytechley confronted him with two half-sheets of Everard's letter. An irascible flush lit up her cheeks with a glow that might almost be

felt. Prickly sparkles were projected from her eyes. Resentment and triumph contended for the mastery of her mouth. Every feature, every expression of attitude and movement excluded questions, doubts and scruples.

"I am ruined for ever," he said to himself with the morbid calmness of despair. "I must have pulled it out with my pocket-handkerchief when she upset the flowers, and the breeze from the open window must have carried it into a corner. She is too quick not to guess that the affair in the lane was contrived by Giacomo in my interest, and she is so curious that she will never rest till she has ferreted out the whole secret. I know her so well. All is lost now, lost for ever."

"You needn't begin to pity *him*," said Lady Dytechley in a sharp voice. "I can't think how you can be so unjust-minded as to sympathise with the wrong side like that. Indeed I *must* say that I am surprised and grieved and disappointed at your keeping such a thing from me. You had this letter in your pocket, and you would have let poor dear Ida go on believing in that wicked hypocrite. '*But they shall know how that this is Thy hand, and that Thou, Lord, hast done it.*' '*For the Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all those that are oppressed with wrong,*' and '*therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light, and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.*'"

The Marquis, whose mind had been slightly relieved at hearing himself accused of nothing worse than ill-bestowed sympathy, shuddered at the three texts that followed each other without any sound of full stops. Delivered and emphasised as they were, they left a general impression of people knowing too much about him and of Lady Dytechley clambering over the roofs to proclaim it. The idea may be grotesque, but symbolical images of danger usually are so. He saw no fun in it himself, neither did Lady Dytechley, who, with due regard to appearances, supplemented the texts with a dignified apology for her inspection of the letter.

"I can't be too thankful for having picked this up," she said, "though it puts me in a very disagreeable position. I picked it off the floor, of course not knowing what it was; and such words caught my eyes in *his* handwriting! I have

only read those few words, but I *do* think that I ought to see the rest. Here it is. Do as you like about it. I have seen enough to satisfy myself that I was more than right in my opinion of him."

The Marquis took the two half sheets with a gesture of courteous hesitation, ran his eyes quickly over their contents, and, for the first time since he had re-entered that room, breathed freely. He saw that neither of them betrayed his own secret, and he let the devil enter into his councils.

"There is no remedy," he thought, or his monitor suggested. "She must read the rest of these two pages now. She has made the worst inference, and if I show any scruples about her reading it through, I shall enrage her and lose all."

"Never mind," said Lady Dytechley. "I really don't care to read it. I only thought you might like for your *own* sake."

"Not for my own sake," said the Marquis, putting the letter into her hands, "but for yours. I cannot refuse it to you."

She took the compliment and the two half sheets, and holding the letter out as if it were a printed proclamation, read it through eagerly.

"A very pretty revelation indeed," said she. "So he has been concealing a girl in the tower after carrying her off! I think you *might* have told me of it; but I suppose you were trying to bring him into a better state of mind. And how came the letter to be torn in two like that? Were you provoked with it?—or did you want to light a candle? There now, that will do. I see by the shrug of your shoulders how it is. What do you think of it? Don't try to defend him. I will forbid you the house and never speak to you again, if you do."

The Marquis winced at the needless prohibition, hesitated to give a definite assent, and for a moment wished, with grim sarcasm, that his conscience were as clear of treachery as it was of any intention to defend Everard.

"I asked you what you thought of it," said Lady Dytechley, again directing the prickly sparkles from her eyes full upon him.

Still he hesitated. He was prepared to consent by silence

and shrugs, but not in words, not by active co-operation. What should he do? Time pressed, and the prickly sparkles continued to come at him. Was he to tell her who the woman was, and renounce all his hopes, or choose the alternative in all its blackness? A way out was suggested, we say not how nor by whom, and responded to thus:—

“If it be treachery, it is not formal, for I do not consent to it as such.”

That so transparent a sophism could deceive him, let any one believe who can; but it answered the purpose of hustling away the scruple.

“It seems a very simple question,” said Lady Dytechley, turning aside and shutting up a blotting book, “and *might* have been answered by one who professes to be a friend. But never mind—it really doesn’t signify.”

“*Che volete?*” thought the Marquis. “What do you wish me—to say?” he replied, incautiously forgetting the difference of idiom.

“What do I *wish* you to say?” she exclaimed. “What do *you* mean? If *you* are ready to say whatever is wanted, tell it to some one else. I asked you what you thought, not what would be convenient to say.”

“I understand your feelings,” answered the Marquis, colouring in spite of all efforts to the contrary; and drawing a deep breath as quietly as he could, “but pray be calm. You surely cannot suppose me to have meant that you wanted me to say what I did not believe, and that I was ready to do so.”

“Now don’t be affronted and all that. You *must* see that it was very provoking to be met with a question when I asked for an answer.”

“No doubt. It was my mistake. I meant, “What *can* I say? What can you expect me to say, feeling as I do?”

“To say the truth—nothing more. In the first place, what was the ‘*affair in the lane?*’ and why was it ‘*serio-comic?*’ and what were the *two roughs* doing there? And who was the *leader?*—and what was he the leader of?—and who was the ‘*poor thing?*’ that was frightened and not the worse for it? I have more to say about her presently; but that will do to begin with. What is the meaning of all that?—and how did you hear of it?”

“I heard of it as one often hears of things from this

person or that, in these days, when half the world does nothing but travel from place to place and write letters."

"Yes ; but what had he to do with the woman and the roughs ?"

"Well—really, I was not there. How can I be expected to know all his affairs ?"

"His affairs ! I understand. You needn't say any more. And I suppose he carried her off to Freville Chase—he says so in fact. Now then—what do you think of *that* ?"

"I must beg you to excuse me from answering so painful a question," said the Marquis, in a low voice that betrayed strong emotion, as well it might.

"Yes, if you wish it : " answered Lady Dytchley. "I don't wonder, I am sure, at your feeling ashamed for him I have heard enough, and more than enough."

At this moment the carriage was announced.

"It must wait," she said. "No ! It had better come back in an hour."

"Then I will go, and return in time," said the Marquis, who felt a natural anxiety to escape from the danger of further cross-examination.

"No—don't go yet. I may be able to start sooner. I will be back presently. Here is this precious document."

She put the two half sheets into his hand and leaving him to his reflections, left the room. He replaced them in his pocket, and repeated to himself many times :—

"I have not done it. Everything has combined exactly to make it so. She said it all herself, and would *not* listen."

Lady Dytchley went into Ida's room, heaved a reproachful sigh, and began a series of sobs, in which the lachrymose element yielded to the explosive, till the sound burst into articulation.

"I knew how it would be !" she said. "I told you, and warned you, and begged, and prayed, and said all I could, in spite of everything, and you wouldn't listen to me. And now the whole thing comes out worse than I expected—very, very much worse. Thank God, it was found out in time ! But, oh ! oh ! oh ! My poor child ! What a horrible thing ! You really should have trusted me, and believed that I should never, never have put it off, and come abroad, and left your father to be shot by that Jesuit with red whiskers, and Elfrida to be caught as soon as my back was

turned, and made to write a pack of lies about it, without good reasons for what I did. And now even *you* must see how right I was, and how I couldn't have acted differently, and did the only wise and prudent thing that was to be done in such a position. But oh, it *is* too dreadful. I don't know how to say it, how to break it to you. Oh! My poor Ida! Oh " —

Here the oft-repeated interjection swelled and softened into one prolonged sob, that increased rapidly in volume of sound but was somewhat too fat in quality to be alarming.

Ida struggled, for a few moments, between the influence of a mother's tears and the effect of the secret just let loose like the typical cat out of a bag. The implication that had escaped with it against Everard decided the struggle, and she said firmly :—

"I thought you came abroad by medical advice. You told me so then, and since repeatedly?"

"So I did," answered Lady Dytchley, checking the sobs and reddening from pink to scarlet. It *was* that—everybody knows it was—and I am sure *you* do, whatever you may say, who were there all the time and *must* have seen how ill I was, and two doctors telling me that I must, and he speaking to you about it—that is, I don't know, of course, but I suppose he did. They told me, as you know, that I must have change of air and scene, and I am sure I don't know how I should have got through it at all without, with everything that has happened since we came here : but do you suppose that I should let that interfere with the wedding, unless it had been for your good, and I had known it was, and had reason to feel he wasn't what he seemed? Oh! for shame! you ought to know me better!"

"But what have I done? I only said what you told me before we left home and ever since."

"Yes, but there was a way of saying it. Well, never mind. I don't blame you, though it *was* very very hard to have it made out as if I had acted wrongly by you. And I know that's what he has said and insinuated, and twisted all my words to make his own case, and made you believe that he was an angel when, all the time he was—Oh! it really is too much. Oh! oh! My poor child! That I should ever have lived to tell you such a thing!"

Here Lady Dytchley buried her face in her hands over

the table, and the sobs began again ; but their tone was fat and the implication against Everard vaguely intolerable. Ida rose to her feet and stood quite still. Her eyes seemed unnaturally large, and there was no colour in her face. Lady Dytechley looked up through her eyelashes.

"I am not afraid to hear," said Ida. "Nothing can shake my confidence in Everard. What has any one dared to say against him?"

Lady Dytechley felt that she must be equal to the occasion, though a tiresome misgiving did cross her, as a cockchafer bumps against one's face on a summer's evening. Had she been the Marquis Moncalvo, she might perhaps have told herself that it was not an occasion of sin, because she had made, not met it ; but never having heard of such a thing, she escaped that temptation to sophistry of the grosser sort, and simply brushing away the outer scruple, drew herself up to speak with full weight of authority.

"Dared to say against him?" she echoed in a tone of mingled sympathy and sarcasm. But the sympathetic note was too flat, and the sarcasm too obtrusive and triumphant. Her temper was up and her tact was down. As Napoleon said after the battle of Waterloo, it was a day of false manœuvres.

"Yes," said Ida, "I wish to know what the particular accusation is, and who has dared to make it. I have a right both to know the one and the other.

"I was going to tell you, only you wouldn't listen. I hadn't the heart to tell you all at once. It upset me so that I hardly knew what I was saying. That wicked hypocrite Everard Freville" —

"Please don't say that again. I can't remain in the room to hear it. I ask you what has been said of him."

"Said? Unhappily I have proofs that all the time he was pretending to be so devoted to you, and so religious, he was concealing an Italian girl in the tower, and as soon as we were out of the way and your father laid up with his accident, took her openly into the house, in spite of the old servants. Oh! there never was" —

"The whole story is a vile fabrication," interrupted Ida. "I shall write and tell him of it at once."

"Do as you please ; but you will only drag the thing on and prolong the pain of your disenchantment. I should not

have spoken of it to you, if I had not been certain. I have the proofs."

"What are they?"

"I am not at liberty to say, at least not at present: but you really might believe me and write to break it off finally."

"Of course I believe that you have been told so"—

"But I tell you I have the proofs."

"On whose word, and with what guarantee for their truth? People can make proofs easily enough when they have it all their own way. *Les absents ont toujours tort*. When he acknowledges the truth of the charge I will believe it, but not until then,—and that will never be. I will write and ask him now—this moment"—

"And mind you say (or else I shall have to write it myself) that if he doesn't explain it all and completely clear himself, by return of post, we shall know that he can't deny it, and he must consider that all is at an end. I am sure *that* is giving him every chance."

How he could disprove such a charge in a letter by return of post, is a question to which the answer is not apparent. A lawyer would say that she was giving him no chance at all. Ida's notions of evidence were not very precise; but she knew that something was wrong about it, and feeling that his presence had always been their best protection, she said:—

"He must come. I am telling him so."

"Well, if you *will* have it," answered Lady Dytchley, startled at this announcement. "But he must be here by return of post—mind that!"

"How can he come by the post?" said Ida, continuing to write.

"He can come as quick as the post, if he chooses," answered Lady Dytchley, reddening. "The post comes by railway."

"Not if he is away from home and the letter sent after him." You are not allowing him time enough to get here. Ten days at least"—

"Well, well, then, ten days. It will all be to no purpose; but you won't believe me—as if I could have any other object than your good! Shall you be ready soon to drive out into the country? It will do you good. I put off the carriage after it had come to the door."

"No one told me," said Ida; "but I shall be ready in a few minutes."

Lady Dytchley left the room to dress for the drive, and soon afterwards rejoined the Marquis.

"By the by, I had put the carriage off," she said, ringing the bell. "It *is* too provoking"——

"Can I do anything for you?" said he.

"No, thank you. It wasn't that, it was something else that is so *very* provoking—but we may as well go at once."

"He opened the door to order the carriage, and avoid further cross-examination, but being met by the courier, was obliged to return and listen to such things as it might please her to communicate.

"Yes—too provoking—he is coming here," she said, "Everard, I mean—coming here directly—do you understand? She would have it so. I never imagined that she would send for him! I can't help it. He is coming about this, and he will persuade her that black is white, and find out, of course, that I have seen his letter to you. He *must* be sure of that for I had no other way of knowing it. Well! there it is. I can't prevent her letter going—I only wish I could."

So did the Marquis, with such desperate intensity, that he turned away to recover himself and walked up to the window, pretending to look for the carriage. Ida now came into the room, rang the bell, and gave her letter to be posted. He felt that the crisis of his fate had come: irrevocable ruin was before him, and that letter would bring it.

"*Awake, arise! or be for ever fall'n!*" said the tempter. "Will you give her up, disgrace your name and incur the loss of your soul, for the sake of one who would not stretch forth a finger to save you, when he could?"

At the same moment an idea flashed through his mind, and he grasped it with his will. His emotion was now so intense that his manner was calm and his voice quite steady.

"I will go and hurry the carriage," he said, "or you will be kept waiting, for you ordered it little more than half an hour ago, to come in an hour."

"Thank you—how very kind," said Lady Dytchley. "So thoughtful of you! Really, I don't like to give you so"——

"Much trouble" was the end of the sentence ; but owing to the speed of the Marquis, it was left on the wrong side of the door. She then sat down to gather the general wisdom of the newspapers from Galignani, deeming it inexpedient to say more about Everard as yet. While she was settling herself and her dress for that purpose the Marquis was following the courier, or rather what was in his hand. He caught him half-way downstairs, put Ida's first letter, which he had delayed to post, into his hand and took away the second, saying—

"It was a mistake. This is the letter that Miss Dytechley wished to—go."

The courier bowed his assent to the exchange, and fell back to let him pass. The Marquis went on a few paces and stopped again.

"By the by," he said, "I wish you would tell them to bring the carriage as soon as they can. I was going myself, but I find that I have forgotten something at home. I shall be here before it comes."

He then hurried home, opened a dressing case, the key of which was on his watch-chain, and taking the four half-sheets of Everard's letter out of his pocket, allowed himself to think within limits.

"There it must remain," he thought. "The next time I might let the wrong halves fall on the ground, to be picked up by Lady Dytechley. I have not done this : it has been forced upon me. What right had she to look at another person's letter and insist on reading it all ? All ! Yes, all that she would have let me speak of. When I tried to speak she said, 'Don't defend him,' and refused to listen."

He placed the four half sheets in the pocket of the dressing-case, and the exchanged letter behind.

"It shall be posted in a few days," he told himself, as he locked the dressing-case. "I am not depriving him of it. I am only defending myself, struggling to save my own soul."

The devil had triumphed, and understanding his business, left him alone to float down the stream on which he was now fairly launched.

A few minutes later the Marquis handed Lady Dytechley and Ida into the carriage. Ida, who had no suspicion of

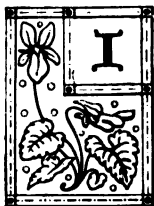
anything worse than a gross calumny that would collapse at the sight of Everard, talked as much and as agreeably as she could, to make up for what she had been compelled to say about the supposed proofs. Lady Dytchley interpreted this according to her own wishes, and wrote it down on the tablets of her memory for Lady Oxborough. The Marquis saw it in the colour of his own hopes, and indulged in day-dreams nervously at intervals.

When they had returned home, Lady Dytchley said : " I am quite worn out with it all," and shut herself up for the rest of the day in her bedroom, fuelling her intentions with interior philippics against Everard, who, all unconscious of the strange things extracted from his letter by means of a paper knife, was congratulating himself, at Freville Chase, on a deal by which he had obtained a satisfactory pair of carriage horses for Ida.





CHAPTER XX.



IT seemed that foreigners were busy with Everard's affairs about that time ; for, less than a fortnight after, when he was again at Freville Chase, he was told that a French-woman wanted to see him.

"In the justice room," he said, and walked in.

"Alms for herself, or a warrant against somebody," he thought. "I hope there is no mystery. I am beginning to have as great a horror of them as Sir Roger Arden, and with good cause."

As soon as the woman entered the room he saw that she was not French, but Italian, probably Piedmontese. He had yet to learn who had come to 'start his quiet.'

"I don't like your face," he thought : but "perhaps you are better than you seem."

"It would not have been difficult to be so, for her face had a singularly unpleasant expression : but the opinion is doubtful. She was the woman of the middling countenance who had come not for alms nor for a magistrate's warrant, but on business of a private and confidential nature, to be explained in her own way. She cast a quick glance at the door, to see that it was shut, and advanced gradually. Her manner was at once cringing and obtrusive.

Thought Everard, "You are as unpleasant a specimen of

humanity as I ever saw. I wish you would go about your business, whatever it may be, and let me ride back to Netherwood before dark."

"I am a poor leetle woman," said she, "who has come for to do to you one big service, very big."

"Thank you," said Everard reservedly. "Will you sit down? What is it?"

"That is my secret, what you may know when it shall please you."

"By what means?"

"By me; but you must pay me money."

"I knew that," thought Everard. "How much, and what for?" he said.

"What for? I shall show you how you shall have millions"——

"Nonsense! My good woman do tell me plainly what your business is."

"I tell you no lies. It is the truth what I say. You shall be very rich and big, and be an alderman"——

"Thank you! I had rather not. But how am I get all these wonderful things?"

"It is I what shall show it to you; but I am a poor leetle woman, oh! so poor."

"Will you have the goodness to tell me distinctly what it is that you propose to do, and what you want for doing it."

"I want one hundred pounds now, and a writing, signed by you, to pay me five hundred pounds every year when you shall be what I say."

"Rather a high price to pay for being an alderman," thought Everard. "How am I to get rid of this fortune-teller, or lunatic, or confederate of house-breakers?"

"You must have mistaken me for somebody else," he said. "Millions are out of the question, of course; but I have nothing to inherit from anyone."

"I not know what inherit means; but I know where the money is."

"Where is it then?"

"Give me one hundred pounds, and sign the writing, and I shall tell it to you."

"Do you mean to say that you expect me to pay you beforehand, without any guarantee for what you state?"

"I do not know nothing of guarantee. I know that the

money is there, and that I can show you how it may be yours."

"This is mere waste of time. No one in his senses would listen to such terms."

"They shall be very good for you, if you believe me. If not—um!"

"They may be so; but you give me no proof."

"Ah! you do not know me."

"How can I find out whether she is mad or a swindler?" thought Everard. Is it a mere trick to get money? Or is there something behind?"

"You refuse my good offer?" said she, getting up and backing towards the door. "Then I go for my affairs. But you shall lose very much, Oh! so much, and you shall never more have the means to know the secret. *Ve lo dico io*. Good morning Sare Freville."

"I am not refusing your offer," said Everard; "but you cannot expect me to take your unsupported word as a proof of what you state, and bind myself beforehand"——

"No, not before. It shall be after, after, when you shall have the money. I only ask one hundred pounds now. It is not much."

"Would you give as much to a person you had never seen or heard of, with only his unsupported word of the truth of what he promised?"

"That is not the same. I am a poor leetle woman'——

"Would you risk sixpence on the same terms?"

"Sixpence! I have paid many sixpences for to travel here, all for your good. But I shall go."

"Let us come to the point. We are strangers to each other, and therefore there cannot be much confidence between us. You want to secure your reward before you trust me with your secret, and I want to be sure that the secret is worth having before I trust you with the money. There is reason on both sides, but much more on mine than on yours. My character is open to your inspection, but yours is not open to mine, unless you open it yourself. Before I agree to anything I must know that you are in good faith. You are a Catholic, of course."

"Yes, yes. What would you wish me to say?"

"I don't care about what you say but about what you are. When did you last go to your duties?"

"Duties? What duties? Do they not more soon come to me? Where shall I go to find them?"

"You know very well what I mean," said Everard; "and I see how it is about that. Well then—you won't tell me the secret, for which you want a hundred pounds down; and I won't pay the money without knowing that what I pay it for is worth paying for and may honourably be paid for by me. If you will tell it to the priest here (he is at home now) I promise to do as he shall advise."

"*Io confessarmi?*" screamed the woman of the middling countenance, her face becoming livid with rage and her eyes flaming with malice. "*Vattene al Diavolo con tutti i tuoi pretacci.* You big clerical hypocrite! You wish to get my secret from the confessional, eh?"

"I didn't ask you to tell it *in* confession but *out* of confession, thus enabling the Priest to advise me about accepting the offer you have made: and you know as well as I do that a secret told in that way would be kept as inviolably by a Priest as if it were told in the confessional. You know that there is no other way of showing yourself to be in good faith. You know that, whichever way he might see fit to advise, your secret would be as inviolably in your own power as it is at this moment. You know all this as well as I do, and if you were in good faith, you would accept my proposal. I made it simply for the purpose of testing you, and it has tested you. Your answer has proved what I suspected before, that you have not only given up the practice of religion, but imbibed a deadly hatred of it. I know, and you know, where that hatred comes from. How then can I trust you?"

"You know nothing. You are one big fool. I go now to the other man, and you shall never, no, never, never have the riches. You beastly Jesuit! You false aristocrat, sucking the blood of the peoples! But I shall have my revenge—I tell it you, *J.* The other man shall have it. And you will wish to see me again, but I shall not come. You shall wish, and be so sorry and grumble and roar; but it shall never, never be yours. All those great riches and everything shall be for the other man."

"Take what you like to the other man, whoever he may be; but do think of your own soul and be reconciled to the Church. You have no excuse. You are sinning against light."

"Have you finished your predica?" said she in a tone that was meant to be sarcastic, but only expressed rage and despair. "Can you show me my soul, and make me touch it with the hand, eh?"

"You know where it will be, sooner or later, if you go on in this way. You know that our Lord died on the cross to save it, and you know that it cannot be saved unless you correspond with the Grace you are rejecting. Listen to me before you go. It may be your last opportunity."

For an instant she appeared to hesitate, or at least to struggle with herself: then her countenance darkened into an expression of hideous malice.

"*Serva umilissima,*" she said, opening the door and darting a last look of defiance towards, rather than at him.

He fixed his eyes on hers, and she quailed beneath them.

"Have mercy on yourself," he said, "that God may have mercy on you."

She struggled to escape from that look of mingled pity and reproach.

"Take away those eyes from me," she said. "They burn. It is too late. I cannot, I will not. That is my last word."

And so it was, in fact. She wriggled out of sight, round the half-open door, pulled it after her without shutting it, and rushed out of the house, trying to forget the expression of his eyes, and ignore that power in them which had compelled her to see herself as she was, obstinately sinning against light. Never more was she seen at Freville Chase.

Everard left the room and went to his private sitting-room in the tower, where Elfrida, who had ridden with him from Netherwood, was looking over some of his books.

"The horses are at the door," he said. "I am afraid I have kept you waiting; but a mysterious stranger detained me."

"I was not aware of being kept waiting," said she, gathering up her gloves and whip, "for your books interested me so. But who was the stranger? I don't like mysteries."

"Mysteries have persecuted me for the last two months and more. I often think of Sir Roger's favourite saying, that they are 'no good except in articles of faith and that sort of thing.'"

"But do tell me who it was, and what he said. Somehow I can't help wishing that I had been present."

"So do I, for I have a strong belief in your penetration; but she (for it was a woman) would not have spoken before you. She was an Italian—Piedmontese, I think—with a villanous countenance, and redolent of the worst Italian Liberalism. She said that she could show me how to be very rich. I was to have millions—whether lire sterling or tenpences, I don't know—and be an alderman if I liked; but she wanted a hundred pounds down for the secret and a bond for five hundred a year, to be paid when I had got the millions. It was only a trick to get a hundred pounds. When I objected to giving it, she was abusive, calling me a Jesuit, with an epithet or two, and an 'aristocrat sucking the blood of the peoples.'"

"Did she say that of you?"

"In so many words; and she looked as savage as the 'spotted hyena, what the hart of no man can't tame.'"

Elfrida's eyes flashed fire, and the beautiful curves of her mouth stiffened into strong lines.

"This of you!" she said. "You who think of every one except yourself? I wish I had been there."

"Only the jargon of the sect," said Everard. "There is nothing in that."

"I daresay; but there is something more in this than appears. An imposter would have been more civil. Couldn't you find out anything?"

"Not without agreeing to her terms, which no one but a madman would do. And besides, the story is ridiculous."

"I don't know about that. I feel sure there is something behind. Can't you get hold of the woman and let me see her?"

"I don't know where she is gone; but I did all I could. I tested her thoroughly: I will tell you the rest on the way home."

"Yes," said Elfrida, as she hurried downstairs, "I want to be off at once, and try if we can catch her up."

"There is no chance of that," said Everard, putting her on her horse.

"Never mind!" she replied, trotting off: "we can but try."

As soon as they were out of the courtyard she broke into a canter, and continued to ride at that pace for some

distance, looking about in every direction ; but the woman of the middling countenance was nowhere to be seen.

"And you really think there is nothing in her story?" said Elfrida, after a while.

"Nothing. She only wanted to do me out of a hundred pounds and be off. In the first place, where is the money to come from? I think nothing of her calling it millions, for a foreigner of her class would be likely to exaggerate, without any definite limit, about English money; but if I were in the entail of anything, which I am not, or had anything left me by will, which I have no reason to expect, I should have legal notice of it."

"True; but isn't there such a thing as unclaimed dividends?"

"Yes, but there can't be any for me: at any rate, not much. It was only a trick to get a hundred pounds."

"More likely to get your signature and get you into her power. There is something in the background."

"I don't see what."

"There is though."

And she persisted in that opinion, all arguments to the contrary notwithstanding.

As they rode into the stableyard they met Sir Richard.

"I had a letter from your mother by the second post," he said, lifting Elfrida from her horse. "She says they will be here positively by the end of this month, November—if not before—that she means to leave Florence directly, and that we must not be uneasy about not getting letters, because they would only be stopping for one night at different places on their way home. She also says that Ida was expecting to hear from Everard in answer to her last letter."

"But I wrote the day I received it," said Everard. "Which way are they going?"

"Well, she doesn't exactly say; but it's all right, you know, all right. They were to begin their journey homewards three days ago."

"I will write again by to-night's post," said Everard, hurrying into the house. "It may catch them before they leave Florence."

THE ATHERSTONE SERIES, No. 2.

FREVILLE CHASE.

BY

E. H. DERING,

AUTHOR OF "SHERBORNE; OR, THE HOUSE AT THE FOUR WAYS,"

"MEMOIRS OF GEORGIANA LADY CHATTERTON,"

"IN THE LIGHT OF THE XXTH CENTURY," "ESOTERIC BUDDHISM,"

ETC., ETC

Θεὸς ὀνδαμῇ ὀνδαμῶς ἄδικος, ἀλλ' ὥς οἶόν τε δικαιοτάτος, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτῷ ὁμοιότερον οὐδὲν ἢ ὅς ἂν ἡμῶν αὖ γένηται ὅτι δικαιοτάτος· περὶ τούτου καὶ ἡ ὥς ἀληθῶς δεινότης ἀνδρός καὶ οὐδενία τε καὶ ἀνανδρία. PLATO, *Theætetus*.

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CHAPTER XXI.



ULLY persuaded that there was something in the background, Elfrida insisted on employing all legitimate means to track the woman of the middling countenance. Police inspectors were confidentially questioned in Ledchester, Lyneham and Exbourne: Bolton and other carriers being observers of local events, reported from the villages. But the result was like a dishonoured cheque; there were no effects. Middling countenances were indeed to be found, and in greater abundance than could be wished; but they were of native growth. Everard, who adhered to his opinion that the mystery was nothing more than a trick to cheat him out of a hundred pounds, took no interest in the search.

In the meanwhile Ida was awaiting his reply to the letter that he had not received. Her state of mind would have given cause for anxiety to any intelligent well-wisher, not prejudiced by views peculiar and personal such as those of Lady Dytechley and the Marquis Moncalvo. She was confident, but her confidence included too much. Instead of concentrating itself on Everard, or rather on the alleged fact regarding him, it included separable accidents and, in a manner, pinned her faith on a space of time. Therefore, when the space was narrowing towards its close and the accidents were unfavourable, she grew restless, became introverted and lost the freedom of her soul. Lady Dytechley saw this, and seeing no further than her own point of view, smiled in secret. The Marquis watched it from his own, and told himself to hope.

At the end of ten days, that were supposed to test the truth of the accusation, but only tested the lock of the Marquis's dressing case, Lady Dytchley looked resigned and sighed at intervals. The next morning she appeared to have grown anxious. On the twelfth day after she was obtrusively sympathetic. The thirteenth and fourteenth days were devoted to tears and indignant mutterings. On the fifteenth she suddenly exclaimed, "*I believed, and therefore will I speak. I said in my haste, all men are liars.*"

"You are going the way to make me say it deliberately, and believe in nothing else, human or divine," said Ida, in a voice quite unlike her own. "If you can prove to me that Everard is false, you will have succeeded in rooting all faith from my heart. Through faith in him I rose to faith in One True Church, without which, life is a puzzle, and happiness a quicksand. Through my love for him I grew to love God; and if"——

"You ungrateful girl!" interrupted Lady Dytchley, dropping, in her irritation, the sympathetic system that she had intended to follow. "You know I taught you all that; but he has made you untrue, like them all: Can you look me in the face and say I didn't?"

"My dear mother, you did not. You taught me that I ought to have faith, but not what it was that I ought to have faith in. You taught me to be afraid of God, but not to love Him. The Catholic Church alone satisfies the cravings of heart and soul; and if it is not true, there is no truth. This last and utterly inconceivable trial has maddened me. I feel as if my will were becoming paralyzed, and I—drifting I know not where. If Everard is false to me, I shall cease to believe in anything: I know that I shall. I can't help it. You don't understand me. You don't know what I feel, what I am been driven to. You have no idea of it. You persuade yourself that I can transfer myself, just as I am, and that you can bring me back to a Church founded on contradiction. My dear mother, you delude yourself."

"Don't talk to me in that way," said Lady Dytchley, losing her temper and resorting to highly coloured assertions.

"One would really suppose that I had brought it about, and made it all myself, and begged *him* to carry off an Italian girl from her parents and hide her in the tower at Freville Chase."

"If anyone does suppose such a thing, it will not be from any words of mine," said Ida, rising to leave the room. "I never said or implied that you had done anything. I say that you don't understand me about it. You flatter yourself that I could get over being deceived in Everard; but I could not. I am not saying so in a fit of sudden excitement, but after full consideration. I have had to face it in imagination for the last fortnight continually, as you must know—you who have been putting it before me all day long and telling me that you had positive proofs of its being a fact. I have faced it, thought of it, examined myself on it, and I tell you deliberately that if it were true, I should have no faith in anything—no hope, no charity. In losing him I should lose all. You will say perhaps that I must be mad to talk so. I *am* nearly so."

"You had better be careful," remarked Lady Dytechley's conscience.

"But there is his own admission," answered her obstinacy.

"Are you quite sure that you read the letter right?—and that Ida's letter reached him?" said prudence.

"Remember which way your wishes point," said conscience, "and how curiously they have coincided with the peculiar progress of events during the last two months."

"Well! and what of that?" exclaimed obstinacy and anger in unison. "That only shows how right I was."

Conscience had nothing more to say, but Ida had.

"I *am* mad in a way," said Ida, "mad with worry, but not from any doubts about Everard. Nothing will persuade me to believe that he is different from what I know him to be."

"My poor dear child!" said Lady Dytechley in a softer tone; "I have tried to break the news to you by degrees; but I see it is of no use. You must know then that my authority was Everard himself."

Ida's lips became white, and every nerve trembled.

"You must have misunderstood him," she said. "I will believe no one but himself."

"Will you believe his own handwriting?"

There was a dead silence for a few seconds, and then Ida turned away to leave the room.

"Will you believe me when I tell you that I have seen and read it in his own handwriting?"

"You don't know what you are doing by all this—you

really don't," said Ida, grasping the handle of the door.

"You won't listen. I tell you I have seen and read it myself."

"I can't help what you have seen. You will know what you have done, when it is too late."

"It really is," began Lady Dytechley, rising from her chair, "it really is too"——

The door closed on the adverb, but it came out on the inside. "Trying" was the word, and it was well chosen, for it appeared to try her temper as well as her resources.

"Nothing *will* persuade her," she said aloud. "She must see the letter. He *must* let me have it. He will be here presently."

Soon afterwards he (that is, the Marquis Moncalvo) was announced.

"Oh!" she said, "I wanted to see you so much."

"I would have come sooner," said he, "if I had known."

"Thank you. It will do very well now. Would you kindly show me that letter once more?—Everard Freville's, I mean. It is important that I should. I am very sorry to give you so much trouble; but really it is of the utmost importance to me and Ida. Thank you. It is so kind and considerate, as you always are. I am *so* sorry to give you the trouble, though."

The door had opened itself behind him and she was looking outwards, as if he were walking away.

"So *very* kind of you," said she.

A voice from his temporal or outer conscience, where the principle, *Noblesse oblige*, dwelt in retirement, made a faint objection; but he had gone too far about letters to hesitate now.

"It is not my fault," thought he, in reply, "It was an accident, and she may as well read the letter twice as once."

"But you ought to have told her," said his outer conscience, "that she had misunderstood the half sheets, and that the other two would exculpate Everard."

"And ruin myself by showing them, ruin myself for ever!"

"Refuse to show them then, but don't calumniate Everard."

"I have not accused him"——

"You have, implicitly, by silence and shrugs."

"*Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n!*" suggested some one, not visible.

The temporal conscience was silenced, and the spiritual had been so puzzled of late by the strange things advocated in its name, that it knew not what to say.

By this time—for the remonstrances and their answers had repeated themselves often—he was in his own sitting-room, opening the dressing case. The number of letters there had increased since the four half-sheets of Everard's were stowed away with Ida's, fifteen days before. Four from Everard to Ida had found their way in since then, and the Marquis, as he looked at them, explained the cause of their presence.

"Lady Dytechley *would* ask me to call at the Post Office," he said to himself, "and she said that his letters were doing so much harm. 'They are killing her,' she said. How could I take them to her, knowing that?"

"Do you believe it?" asked his temporal conscience: but he considered the question inopportune and proceeded to select, he did indeed, the two half sheets that fitted into his own requirements and those of Lady Dytechley.

"Oh! You, You—don't force me to say what," groaned the temporal conscience, whose watchword was *noblesse oblige*. "Consider who you are. At least, don't cheat like a card-sharper."

"But how am I to get out of it," objected the Marquis, putting the selected half-sheets into his pocket.

"Say that you inadvertently let her see it because she had it in her hand. Tell her that the odd half-sheets altered the sense, and burn the whole, to get out of showing it."

"And lose my only chance, once and for ever."

"Would you fall so low?"

"I *have* fallen so low. All evil is low and mean. I have but one hope of rising from the abyss. Am I to let myself sink for ever? *Non posso; non debbo; non voglio.*"

With these curiously missapplied words of the saintly Pontiff, Pius IX., he closed the question and returned whence he had come.

Lady Dytechley was grateful, and so was he; but the difference was that she was grateful to him for helping the

rejected Exmore, and he to her for helping him. In both cases the gratitude was undeserved.

"I am *so* much obliged to you," she said. "But do you mind waiting a few minutes? I have to see some one in the next room. I will be back directly."

The Marquis was left alone with his temporal conscience, which teased him much about Lady Dytechley's use of the half letter and called him an accomplice before the fact. He sat uneasily, stood in a shrinking posture, walked up and down. At last he muttered :—

"I know it. All evil is low and mean ; and every act, every thought, that has an evil origin must be low and mean, however dignified it may be made to appear. It all comes from the devil, the father of lies, the lowest and meanest of beings. But what is this last shame, in comparison with the hope of rising from the abyss? For years I have lived on shame, fed on shame ; and shall I reject it now, when I see it offered as the price of my only hope, lying, as it were, between me and the Grace of God?"

"It certainly does lie between you and the Grace of God," whispered a very small voice further within. "Grace from the God of Truth will not pass through falsehood into your soul."

"No ; but when it is a *fait accompli*, and I doing my utmost, in every way, to make amends for what is past"—

"Like a man giving alms out of the profits of a swindle. Do you think that you can cheat Almighty God?"

"How can it be that, when there is no other possibility of being able to do right? He would make another way of escape, if this were sinful."

The little repressed voice made a little inarticulate protest and relapsed into silence. In the meanwhile (for the interior dispute had been compressed into a short space of time) Lady Dytechley, having entered Ida's room, was holding in her hand the selected half-sheets."

"Here is the letter I told you of," she said. "You wouldn't believe me, and so I had to get him to bring it—a very disagreeable thing for me, and for him too. You will see by this that he tried all he could to keep him straight."

"Which is which? I don't understand," said Ida.

"Look here then : here is his own handwriting. I won't ask you any more to take my word. Look and

see for yourself. Do you see whose writing it is ? ”

“ I do,” said Ida, in an unnaturally calm voice. I don’t believe a word of it. I couldn’t if I would, and I wouldn’t if I could. But—please don’t keep me in suspense. You musn’t, indeed. I can’t bear it.”

These last suggestive words brought out the sympathetic element in Lady Dytechley’s composite state of mind.

“ My poor, dear child ! ” she said with much warmth and fatness of tone, “ it breaks my heart to show you this ; but what can I do ? You see how he makes light of the disgraceful riot in the lane, where he carried off an Italian girl from her friends. He calls it a ‘ serio-comic affair ! ’ You will find further on that she was an Italian girl. The Marquis Moncalvo had remonstrated with him about it, and tried to induce him to let her go back to her parents. You will see what sort of an answer he gives. Read this :—

“ I cannot use my influence to persuade her to return to Italy ! Nor can I send her away—looking at her past history,—And what a history !—‘ I can only see that she has a right to my protection as long as she claims it.’—Claims it ! You see the hold she has over him. Oh ! it is too dreadful.—‘ That protection she shall have.’—And if you had married him two months ago, as you would, but for my care, think what you would have found ! Imagine the horrible disenchantment ! Then he speaks of a light seen in the tower, and he says, with a coolness that one can hardly believe possible, ‘ She was concealed there then, but now lives openly in my house with the servants.’—with the servants ! I really can’t make any comment on that—‘ and cannot possibly be a cause of suspicion (as you suggest that she might be) to Miss Dytechley.”

“ Of course not,” said Ida angrily. “ I can’t think how you can believe him capable of acting so—an Italian girl carried off from her friends close to Freville Chase, when there isn’t an Italian within ten miles ! The story is monstrous.”

“ But, my darling, the girl who was frightened in the lane is the same who was concealed in the tower. Read it and see. How do you account for that ? ”

“ I don’t want to account for anything. He will tell all about it when I see him.”

“ When you see him ? How can you say that, when you

have written to him, imploring him to come, and he won't, and hasn't even written a line, though it is now a fortnight ago and more. Here we are now at the 1st of November! You *know* that he received that letter, for Elfrida told you, the last time she wrote that *he had* received your letter posted on the 12th of October, (that was the very day when I first told you of it) and she said that he was out of spirits—no wonder! and I told her, when I wrote last week, that you were expecting to hear from him. He never has been so long before without writing—never. His silence, as well as everything else, proves that he is so ashamed at being found out, he doesn't know what to say! Now read this—it will make the whole thing dreadfully clear to you.

“*But I really do not care*”—that could only be because he felt sure of you, for he speaks about the advantage of your fortune in the next sentence—*and cannot see the beauty you speak of*—*He* to be the only one who doesn't see it! and to say it so coolly, as if we were looking through an opera glass at some one in the opposite box! I told him, the last time I saw him, that he only cared for your money, and here he tells him so. *‘But she seems likely to be a good wife’* (how very condescending!) *and her fortune will restore the old place.* Of course it would. It was meant from the beginning to do that. I knew all along how it was, and his father's object about it, and how the priests made it up, and your father didn't see through it. And I told *him* so, and what he was at. But he can deceive you no longer. You have the proofs before you in his own handwriting. *‘In the same net which they hid privily is their foot taken.’* Oh! you ought to be so thankful. And only think how I found it out—it was quite providential. He had just read it and put it into his pocket, and in pulling out his handkerchief when I upset the flowers, out it came, without his knowing it, and when I picked it up after he had gone, I accidentally saw enough to make me insist on seeing the whole. He was very much annoyed at showing me the letter, and tried to defend Everard; but he saw that I had a right to ask for it. I am sure he has behaved beautifully about it all—so delicate about Everard and so just-minded towards us! and never said a word about having tried to reclaim him, but only tried to turn it off! and he was so vexed when I told him just

now that I *must* see it again. I was quite sorry for him. So very painful, you know, to a man with his punctilious ideas of honour! But I couldn't help it. You wouldn't have believed it without, and I was obliged to insist. Poor fellow! He felt it terribly; but he saw that I had a right to have it, and he gave in. You must let me give it him back now. We have no right to keep it. It really is too hard upon him, to be placed in so disagreeable a position through no fault of his own."

These after-comments were well meant for their purpose, but they were unheeded, unheard. The last sentence in the letter had done its work.

"You poor, dear child," she said, becoming suddenly alarmed at the strange expression on Ida's face. "Oh! don't look like that. Listen to me a moment. Things may not be so bad as they seem—they really may be different."

"It is too late," said Ida with terrible distinctness. "He has written it."

Her voice was thin and wiry: her features were rigid, and had hardened into sharp outlines: her eyes looked into vacancy, and hope was not in them.

"Ida, for God's sake, be reasonable and listen to me! I am going to explain it, I really am. I can make it clear, if you will attend. I understand it all now, I do indeed. I have been wrong, I know I have, and I have misunderstood you and him and everything."

Ida heard the words, but took no impression of their meaning.

"It is too late!" she repeated. "He has written it."

"Ida, Ida, don't be so hard and proud! I am sure you never learned that from Everard nor from his faith."

"His faith? Yes, I remember; but it seems far off. It was a part of him, and of me through and with him. It has all passed away."

"Oh! this is awful, and I have been the cause of it! I was against him, on account of his religion, and I was too ready to believe anything that appeared to be against him. Why you saw yourself how absurd the thing was. There must be some mistake. Write to him. That stupid courier may have forgotten to post your letter. I will take care that this one goes."

"But he says he doesn't care for me. I should never have believed the story without that."

"Yes, but I daresay he wrote in a hurry (in fact he says so) and left out something that would give a different meaning."

"If I could only believe that it is as you say! But all belief has been so shaken. And how can those dreadful words, there, at the end, have any other meaning?"

"Believe me, they may. Take your mother's advice, and write at once."

Ida seized a pen, and throwing herself into the nearest chair, wrote:—

"If you ever cared for me, if you do not wish to break my heart and drive me to despair, come here directly, without losing a moment. My mother too wishes you to come. I wrote more than a fortnight ago, and implored you to come, and you have neither come nor written, though my letter was about such dreadful things"——

"I wouldn't mention that you have seen this one," suggested Lady Dytchley—"it would look as if the Marquis Moncalvo had shown it, whereas it was all my doing—and you can explain the whole thing so much better when you see him."

"There is no occasion to mention it," said Ida, continuing to write. "If he has not deceived me about himself, I will not deceive him about that."

There was such bitterness in the tone of her voice, that Lady Dytchley, startled at first, after a little reflection said to herself:—

"If she can but be angry with him, like that, she will get over it, and all will be for the best."

"Here it is! What shall I do with it?" said Ida, tearing a seal-ring from her finger, and making a shapeless impression with it on the wax.

"If you will give it to me," said Lady Dytchley, "I will take care that it goes. Would you like to drive anywhere to-day?"

"No, please, not. I only ask to be alone."

"I think you are quite right, my dear child. You want repose."

"Repose! Where am I to find it?"

"This is not genuine anger," thought Lady Dytechley, again becoming alarmed. "I see," she said. "It will be so long to wait."

Ida looked up, but remained silent. There was neither intelligence nor feeling in her eyes.

Lady Dytechley moved by degrees towards the door, feeling anxious, yet resenting the unaccepted humiliation of being unable to control what she had aroused. The amount of humiliation would not seem to be much, compared with the anxiety; but it appeared so to her because it was new.

The Marquis was passing a *mauvais quart d'heure* in his own society when she re-entered the sitting-room; for his temporal conscience had obliged him to ask, more than once, what he thought of himself, while the false evidence that consent had made his own was doing its deed of darkness against Everard Freville.

Oh! I am so sorry to have kept you," she said, slipping the two half sheets into his hand. "Thank you very much. I do think it so kind of you."

The Marquis bowed vaguely and tried to turn the conversation; but she interrupted him with the question:—

"Would you do one thing more for me? I want to be sure that this letter goes; and the courier is so tiresome and stupid, and I can't go out myself this afternoon. Would you post it? But really it is troubling you so very much."

"It will be no trouble at all," said the Marquis carelessly.

"Well then, if you would be so kind—I should feel it off my mind. Here it is."

"I had better, perhaps, take it now," said he, putting the letter into his pocket with the two selected half sheets.

"Thank you so very much; but there is plenty of time yet. Well, perhaps it would be better."

"*Frappez vite et frappez fort*," said his temporal conscience, taking to sarcasm as a last resource while he was taking the nearest way to his own rooms. "Finish the work and see what will come of it."

"There is no alternative," he muttered, walking faster; and being a well-read man in several languages, he quoted from Richard III:—

"*All unavoided is the doom of Destiny.*"

A voice within whispered the next line:—

"*True: when avoided grace makes Destiny.*"

"Do it! Suppress her letter to Everard, and see how she will thank you when she discovers it!" He shuddered, but hurried on, refusing to think.

Lady Dytechley remained at home, meditating on the progress of circumstances and speculating with unwonted diffidence on the result.

"I don't understand Ida," she thought repeatedly: which was and always had been true. "She has become so unlike herself, so hard and proud, and doesn't care for Everard at all."

But the unnatural hardness had melted, like an icicle before the sun. Ida, in her own room, was sobbing with a violence that would seem too intense to last; and yet it lasted long without becoming less.

CHAPTER XXII.

*"Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?"*



HE Marquis Moncalvo, who was acquiring an inclination to cite Shakespeare to his purpose, but sometimes found that Shakespeare cited him—as, for instance, in the words,

"Yes; when avoided grace makes destiny"—

remembered these two lines when he was about to call on Lady Dytechley, in Rome ten days afterwards, and wished that he had not remembered them. The question was indeed obvious, and, unlike grace, could not be avoided. He would much have preferred asking it himself, instead of through Richard III; but his temporal conscience had taken to Shakespeare, and went on with partly-quoted bits of the speech, interspersed with comments, thus:—"How would you like

To take her in her heart's extremest hate,

which you will only find out when she has found you out

and reproaches you, as only an injured woman can, having God, her conscience and these letters against you?" You know what Everard is by nature and by grace :—

*'A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman
Framed in the prodigality of nature
The spacious world cannot again afford :
And will she yet abase her eyes on you . . .
On you, whose all not equals Everard's moiety?'*

What is the difference between your conduct and that of Richard III.? He stabbed the Prince of Wales with a dagger; you stab Everard with a lie. He woo'd the widow afterwards; you scheme to do so beforehand, and contrive a deed of treachery for the purpose. In that respect you are the worst of the two."

This unexpected comparison of himself "a marvellous proper man," with the misshapen Duke of Glo'ster trying to win the widow of the Prince that he had stabbed in his "angry mood at Tewkesbury," startled and convinced, but did not persuade him. It was the last word of his temporal conscience, and he left the echo of it behind him on the Pincian Hill, which he slowly descended, clinging to his purpose.

Lady Dytechley had arrived the day before, having come to Rome because Lady Oxborough and her son were there and left Florence because Everard was not there. She was pitiably bewildered, being unable to understand Ida's new state of mind, settle her own, or see her way through the confusion she had created. She felt that all was going wrong, suspected some foul play about Everard, and told herself in private that, all things considered, she had made mistakes; but her regret at the failure of her pet project was such "sweet sorrow," that she came to Rome for the purpose of indulging in it with prudence and remedial care. A blind optimism, born of obstinacy, had so far restored her shaken self-confidence.

Ida was in a state of mind that would have dispelled optimism and aroused grave apprehensions, if the pet project had not stood in the way, casting false lights and shadows. But the pet project had only been mourned, not abandoned; and it revived by degrees during the journey from Florence. They had not been many hours in Rome when symptoms of its revival showed themselves, and the

symptoms appeared while the Marquis Moncalvo was hearing the last word of his temporal conscience on the Pincian Hill; Lady Dytechley came, much dressed into their sitting-room at the hotel—it matters not which—and said “I thought you were ready,”

“What for?” said Ida, raising her eyes wearily from one of those regenerative newspapers that call themselves moderate.

Lady Dytechley hesitated, and began to feel very uncomfortable. The change wrought in an instant by the last sentence of Everard’s letter to the Marquis Moncalvo was more striking now than when it frightened her out of her self-satisfaction at Florence. Veiled by a reserve that passed for gradual consent, it had increased unperceived, and, like a tree on which the dead leaves have hung as long as the heavy stillness of autumn kept them motionless, began to show at the first breath that what had been was not.

“Well, my dear,” said Lady Dytechley in a persuasive tone, “I thought we were going to call, yow know, on—but never mind, if you feel tired.”

“I don’t feel at all tired,” said Ida, “not the least. I never felt less so.”

The answer had the effect of reassuring Lady Dytechley, by reason of her great desire to be reassured; yet Ida’s voice alone might have made anyone pause and think. The soft melodious ring, that used to be softer and more intense when Everard was by, had become a hard, metallic sound, harder when his name was mentioned. The old tones had left no trace. There was nothing to tell that they had once been, except their absence and the hearer’s memory.

“I keep saying that I am not at all tired, never was so quite entirely the reverse of tired,” she said, throwing the regenerated journal on the top of *Janus*, *Le Maudit*, and other obsolete aids to apostacy that were lying about.

The sound was not encouraging, but the words were interpreted in a favourable sense by Lady Dytechley, who was unable to suppose that her own daughter could be quite entirely the reverse of tired, if unwilling to call on the only friends they knew to be in Rome.

“I am so glad,” she said. “I was afraid that the journey and all”——

"I never was better in my life;" said Ida, and so thought Lady Dytchley, who had noticed the return of colour in her cheeks without perceiving that it was the protracted flush of excitement.

There was an ominous pause. Lady Dytchley hesitated, and wished that somebody were there to make the suggestion for her.

"I will get ready," said Ida, springing from her chair, and pushing back her golden hair with an impatient sweep of her hand; "but I should like to know where we are going."

"I was only thinking," said Lady Dytchley, "that I should like to see—but never mind about it to-day. It will be soon enough to-morrow. I want, of course, to see Lady Oxborough."

"Is *he* there?" asked Ida; and, for the first time since the reading of the selected half sheets, her voice betrayed some emotion.

"I knew that she would appreciate him at last," thought Lady Dytchley.

"Is he there?" repeated Ida looking fixedly on the ground.

"Yes, he is," answered Lady Dytchley, after pausing to enjoy the prospective triumph. "He is there, and in a very sad state. He is quite broken-hearted about you."

"How very interesting! But hearts don't break when there is nothing to break for."

"Oh! how can you say that his had nothing to break for? You must allow him to be the best judge."

"I say there *was* nothing, *is* nothing. Love has a double life. If not returned, it dies out and if betrayed, it withers with the heart that was once its home."

"Why, she talks like a tragic actress," thought Lady Dytchley. "I don't know what to do with her, nor what to think, nor what to be at. I don't see my way out of it. Was anyone ever so beset?"

There was poetic justice in these words; for they were Sir Richard's, after she had made him run away from the settlements, the responsibility and his luncheon. Strength founded on the weakness of some, the dependence of others and the concurrence of circumstances, breaks down utterly when the conditions are suspended. She was as helpless as Sir Richard, and stared at Ida with a kind of

superstitious awe, as if some preternatural power had worked the change that was but too evident."

"She talks like a tragic actress," was the burden of her complaint, "and looks like one, stands like one! I never could have believed that she could have come to that."

And yet it was a very simple thing to understand. On the stage nature is represented by art and in the great tragedies of real life the player's art is represented by nature, otherwise tragic art would not be true to nature, as in its perfection it is, and as nature shows it to be whenever human suffering overpowers habit. Ida's words and manner were tragic, because her life was then a tragedy.

"I repeat," she said, "that if not returned, it dies out. His must have died out, if there ever was any life in it."

"Oh! but there really was—I do assure you there was, indeed," said Lady Dytchley, brightening up at the idea of there being a question of any kind about him.

"Then," said Ida; "it is certain that we ought not to meet. I have no feeling of anger against him now. I had once; but that is past, with all that made me what I was. I speak on his account, not on my own; for I would as soon see him as anyone else.

Lady Dytchley became urgent. "Why not see him, then?" she said. "It won't commit you in the least. Remember they don't know anything. And really he is *so* good, and *so* true, and *so* affectionate, and *so* everything that could be wished in every way, so superior to other young men, and thinks nothing of himself, with everybody making up to him, that, if things had been different"——

"What might have happened if I had been somebody else," interrupted Ida impatiently, "I don't know, and don't care to know; but being what I am, I can only say that nothing could make me tolerate him."

"But, my dear, I never supposed or wished that, just now"——

"It matters not whether you meant now or later. Time has nothing to do with me now, nor will have henceforth, except to make me grow older. It moves towards me, not with and around me. That immense love which has made and unmade me as a woman and as a Christian"——

"My dear! Really you know! One would think I was a Unitarian"——

"Hear me or not, as you please ; but, if I am to speak, I must say what I mean. I referred to myself, not to you nor to anyone else. That immense love, which has made and unmade me as a woman and as a Christian, withered as soon as I became certain that it had been betrayed—withered and died because there was no longer anything to give it life ; but memory remains, and the power of comparing, and sense to distinguish great qualities, though they only aggravated my wrongs, from small ones industriously used and still more industriously trumpeted. The best and most complete man I have ever known, or could imagine, has been false to me, and I no longer believe in goodness. I will have nothing to do with it, nor with anyone who affects it—least of all, a goody young man, who is held up as a pattern because he happens to have no character of his own."

○ "He is nothing of the kind," said her mother, roused to a sense of dignity and interior warmth. "I am surprised that you can speak so, quite. Well then, I must go by myself, I suppose. I shall not be long."

"The skirts of her dress trailed onwards and disappeared through the doorway. Ida smiled, but her smile was like the lines of light that break in hard streaks behind a snow-laden sky, cold and stormy.

"I warned her that it would come to this if it went on," she said to herself, at first aloud, and then in thought. "I felt it before, I believed that it could be, and I struggled against it ; but she would have it, and now she is sorry when it is too late. What nonsense I am supposing ! Her wishing it so couldn't make him write that letter, feel what I saw written in that letter. But he did write it, did feel what he wrote ; for I have seen it. Some one told me once of a German philosopher who made out, if I remember correctly, that one's existence is all imagination. I wondered at the time how one could be able to imagine, if one didn't really exist ; but now I half believe it. I have lived in a dream. All the goodness, the beauty, the hopes, that I believed in were unreal ; and if nothing is real, one must be carried along by the dream of the moment, whatever it may be. Fool ! Don't I know that I am sitting here, that I have read his letter, that my heart, once so loving, was turned by that letter into stone ?"

"Imagination ! I have none left in me. The poetry of

life is gone with the hope that made it. Hope? That means the one great delusion, which has falsified part of my life and unfitted me for the rest. What a far-off sound it is! The thing it means was but of yesterday, and yet I cannot realise it. If *he* could do this, what are goodness and truth?—what are evil and falsehood? Where is the difference? And if there is none, if all that appeals most convincingly to the mind, the heart, the soul, is a mere delusion, what then?"

Weary and heart-sick, seeking relief from her sorrow by clinging proudly to her wrongs, shutting her eyes, by an unnatural effort of overbalanced will, to the last ray of hope that glimmered, from time to time, through the darkness of apparent evidence against Everard, she began to read one of the pseudo-Catholic books that her mother had latterly thrown in her way with a view to facilitate the pet project. She read for awhile, laid the book down, and said to herself:—

"It only shows that the Catholic Church has been kept up by scheming and deception; and this"—here she took up a popular preservative against Popery—this proves that there is no truth about religion, by showing that the Church was never founded at all. For the Gospel tells us, as from Divine authority, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, while this book shows that it did, and very soon. What then? Where was the pure stream to come from when the fountain had been poisoned? From the Bible, they say. And where did they get the Bible from? From a Church that was a mass of lies and corruption. A fine guarantee! My mother may be satisfied with that, but I cannot. If the trunk has no life, I am not going to lean on dead branches and scattered twigs. There is only one religion possible—at least I once thought it was, yes! and believed it was."

Something stronger than her will forced her to add, "And could now, if I would—if I were not so hard and proud;" but she drove the thought from her and substituted, "not now, not now, never again. It is gone for ever, gone with *him*. I felt it false when I found him false. Truth was lost with him. Lost? It never was, for he never was. If he had been, he must have remained for me. My love was so enormous. And his too, as I believed it to be, that this could never have happened, if he had even been what I thought him. It was a beautiful dream. Beautiful! I hardly know what that means now, in any sense. People

used to call me beautiful, and I never cared about it, except for *him*. I did, for his sake ; not supposing him to care for me on that account, but wishing him to possess what is thought to be worth possessing. And now, even that goes away like the rest. I never looked much in the glass, but I can see the difference now."

She rose and walked across the room to a mirror over the chimney-piece.

"I begin to think that I dreamt of myself as well as of him:" she thought. "Is that my face?"

The Marquis Moncalvo, who was then announced, felt quite sure that it was, and thought it more attractive than ever ; but he had reasons of his own for thinking that, and they passed through his mind in an instant as he entered the room. Good and evil were strangely mingled in the second nature which he had acquired by a long course of compromise with himself. They had formed a coalition in which evil was modestly contented to be anonymous, and they now prompted him to rejoice indistinctly at the terrible change.

"There is hope for me now," he thought or felt ; "for she is nearer my own level. But this will pass away with the occasion, and then she will raise me to what I once was." Those were his reasons for thinking her more attractive than ever. The attraction, like that of a magnet, had increased by nearness.

Ida was still looking at the glass, attracted by the expression of her own face there, which fascinated her by the force of hard contrast and encouraged her artificial state of feeling by seeming to have become natural. The waiter had shut the door, and the Marquis was standing close behind her unnoticed.

"No one would venture to call *that* beautiful," she said with a bitter laugh, as she turned away.

"Not when speaking to you," said the Marquis in a low voice, keeping his eyes respectfully from hers. "Compliments deserved are an impertinence, or, at least, they take off half the value of the homage by seeming to imply that the speaker thinks it worth acceptance."

Ida coloured slightly, being taken by surprise, but at once fell back into the state of forced calmness that she was trying to make her own.

"You have caught me talking to myself about myself," she said, "and looking at myself in the glass, too. I never was in the habit of doing either : but the sight of myself rather interested me just now, as a matter of curiosity, to see what one comes to. You are fond of Shakespeare?"

The Marquis acknowledged that he was, and remembered uncomfortably the passage about avoided grace.

"I have read very little of him," said she, "but I do recollect something that puts a parody into my head."

The Marquis turned pale as he watched the hard, sarcastic lines of her mouth, and wondered how that mouth could be hers. "This is the end of my hopes," he thought; "and they end in contempt."

"The parody is against myself," said Ida. "Some are born old, like that man with red whiskers, who never was young; some achieve oldness in the natural course of things; and some have oldness thrust upon them by disenchantments that take the bloom of life away. I have experienced that, and I was noting down the result in my mind when you came into the room. I tell you this, to explain what must have looked very odd." "Very odd," she repeated in a pettish tone.

The poor child was in a temper, and felt angry with it for having led her unawares to betray her feelings through a flimsy veil of indifference.

"I had reasons for not wishing to come here," she said "and I felt annoyed at everything, and talked nonsense. I must beg you to forget that you overheard me talking such rubbish."

"I cannot," said the Marquis, feeling that he was at the crisis of his fate. "I cannot forget what I did not hear"——

"But you *must* have heard me"——

"Not talking nonsense : you never did and never would do that. I heard you depreciate your own—forgive my apparent presumption—your own beauty, because you thought that your noble heart was not valued. That cry of nature was not only touching, it was sublime. Forgive me. I am not worthy to say so much to you."

This reverential sympathy softened the surface, though it could not penetrate beneath.

"I don't know why not," she said, "if you can think it; but I am unable to understand how you can. I can see

nothing sublime in finding out hollowness and feeling weary at the sight."

The Marquis, usually opportune in his answers, could discover no opportunity for himself in this vague reference. The discovery of hollowness, and the prospect inside, were almost as difficult to make sense of as the famous question, "whether a chimera buzzing in a vacuum can eat second intentions:" but time, that could not be recalled, was passing at its own unchangeable pace, and, in a few moments, Lady Dytchley might interrupt him with a smile of welcome. He felt that, if there was any hope, it hung on the moments then escaping him, or, rather, on the abnormal and forced condition of her mind at that time, a condition far too unnatural to last. He drew a deep breath, as silently as he could, and rushed at his fate.

"I, too," he said, "have felt the weariness of disenchantment. I have sought in vain what would satisfy the aspirations of my heart. I have hoped for it, longed for it, despaired of it, and yet I never really knew what it was to despair of happiness till now—now, since I have found the impersonation of my own ideal and felt how unworthy I am of it. I feel it so deeply that, if another feeling were not stronger than myself, I should creep away and hide my hopeless misery in some obscure corner of the earth, where I could exist unknown and die unnoticed. But I feel that this is the crisis of two lives. I know that I am not worthy of you, but I know that younger men are still less so. They have not had the experience of hope unfulfilled, of an ideal unrealised. Your noble and sensitive nature will not bear a cold or an incomplete affection, nor even the suspicion of it. Drive me from you, if such is your will, and you shall never more be wearied by my presence: but hear me for one moment. I have loved you hopelessly, at an immeasurable distance, ever since I first saw you at Netherwood. You will, I think, allow, that as long as circumstances forbade the thought, I kept my torturing secret with irreproachable loyalty—so much so, that no one did or could imagine or suspect the truth. Is it not so?"

"It is, indeed," said Ida. "Nothing surprises me now; but I certainly was not prepared to hear that."

Nor was the Marquis prepared to hear such a quiet acknowledgment of his fervid proposal. He was prepared

to be refused, prepared to appeal against a refusal with all the eloquence of despair, as long as she would listen ; but the calmness of her manner, so intense and yet so cold, nearly reduced him to silence. .

"It would have been better for you," she said, "if you had kept that secret permanently, and let the unfortunate fancy die out, like a dried-up flower, for want of nourishment. It may be all you say—I don't doubt it—but it was ill-omened from the beginning ; for its only possible chance lay in wrong and desolation, its only possible hope in the despair of its object. I am not blaming you, but so it is. Go, and forget the bad dream—it is nothing else. You know not what you seek. Be reasonable, and save me the pain of answering for myself. Be assured that you would find yourself horribly disenchanted. You think of me as I was, and see me so in imagination ; but you deceive yourself. If my heart were what it was, it would be *his*—I tell you it would be *his*, but now it is withered. It was made to be his, and it cannot be another's. I warn you solemnly, at your own peril and mine, to desist from pressing the subject any further. I have been maddened by wrongs, and know not what I might be provoked into doing in my recklessness. Leave me in my misery, and don't persist in trying to bring bitter disappointment on yourself."

"But I care not what I risk, what I lose, what I do, for your sake," said the Marquis. "I only ask"—

"Then do this one thing, if you can, one heroic act. Show me, make me feel, that I have in some strange way misunderstood him. Make me feel that the story is false, that the letter he wrote to you at Florence meant something different from what it appeared to mean. Make me feel this, make me know that there may be some sufficient reason why he has never come, nor telegraphed, nor written. Do this, and you will do an heroic act, at the cheap cost of avoiding disappointment, perhaps remorse. You would not find remorse pleasant—you would not, indeed."

That word had an ominous sound for the Marquis. It stirred his conscience, both spiritual and temporal, But he made a great effort, and said :—

"Remorse ! Why should I feel remorse ?"

"I don't know," said Ida ; "but I have a feeling that you will if you stay here and persist in exciting my restlessness or

mad perversity. I *am* maddened and reckless, and can't answer for what I may be provoked into doing. Listen to me!—as I did to you when you asked me. I can't tell you why, but I feel as if you could do something for me—I don't know what. If you could but prove that I have misunderstood that letter, if you would but find a reason why I have not heard from him, why he will not come—”

The Marquis was silent for some moments, and his eyes were fixed on the ground.

“What can I tell you?” he answered, but his utterance was almost inarticulate. “What can I possibly do? Anything in the world that is possible, I will say or do for you; but”——

“Do you mean that you know of nothing that would — make it different?” she said after a long pause. Her voice was hoarse and tremulous, her face bloodless, her eyes veiled by tears that would not flow.

The Marquis had one last and decisive struggle with his better and truer nature. The result seemed almost doubtful, so strongly did even perverted honour and unpractised religion appeal to what he had once been and might be again. Even necessity, that knows no law when it is genuine and makes its own laws when it is false, yielded a little before the helplessness of the unhappy girl whose life he was blighting by a prolonged act of treachery. He hesitated for a moment, whether in truth or in sentimental theory it is hard to say; but while he did so, Ida spoke again.

“Can't you, then tell me anything to comfort me;” she said, anything about him—Everard?”

“It was the first time she had pronounced his name for six weeks. The sound of that name and the tone of her voice kindled the white heat of jealousy, ever hottest where the injustice of the cause is most clear. Hatred entered into his heart: conscience was paralysed by passion.

“What can I say” he answered, looking on the ground and seeming to speak unwillingly. “You have read the letter that lady Dytechley picked up by accident and—thought fit to examine. She insisted on taking it from me: she showed it to you. Do not, I entreat you, ask me to say more—it would place me in such a terrible position. Spare me that, at least. Lady Dytechley's principal ground of

complaint was, that by his engagement he had spoiled one of the best matches in England—those were her words—and she gave me to understand who it was and why she meant to come here. She implied that she would never rest until—I cannot finish the sentence—until she had made it up. But perhaps—oh! tell me if it is so, and you shall see me no more. Perhaps you—perhaps I ought not to”——

“It never can, never shall be made up,” said Ida passionately. “He has haunted me like a spectre, either himself or his name, ever since I left England. It never can, never shall be!”

“It is her fixed idea,” said the Marquis, his voice trembling with emotion of many kinds and a nervous dread of encountering Lady Dytchley at the inopportune moment. “She has come to Rome for that purpose only, and will not abandon it as long as it seems possible; which means, in her mind, as long as there is no visible barrier. I know, from what she told me, that she will continue hoping for it, believing that you will sooner or later yield, and constantly endeavouring to persuade you.”

“She will, as long as she can,” thought Ida, every nerve and every pulse trembling like leaves, before a storm. “She will, as long as the power remains; and that power is in my hands. I cannot bear to hear of him—he excites me to madness. He has haunted me all through this slow torture, like an evil genius; and now, when all is over, he is to appear again, and try to galvanise the dead heart for himself. Never shall he have the chance, never!”

“Was it wrong of me to warn you?” said the Marquis, raising his eyes deferentially towards hers.

“Wrong? Oh no! I should have thought it strange if you had concealed that.”

“Strange indeed it would have been, if I had or could, have deceived you on such a subject.”

“I cannot endure it. I shall shut myself up and see no one, or leave home and go away, I know not where.”

“What can I say or do? Oh, if I had but the right to protect you!”

Ida’s lips became compressed and white, her face ashy pale, her features and attitude rigid, as if she were walking in her sleep.

"You shall, if you really wish for it," she said with a calmness that much diminished the value of the privilege.

"If I really wish it?" said the Marquis. "And do you still doubt? Oh! tell me again those words that bring hope and unutterable happiness to"—

"Certainly," interrupted Ida with an outward wave of her hand; "but don't be sentimental about it. My life has been so completely blighted that I care very little what happens to me, provided I hear no more of Lady Oxborough and her puppet son. I have no love to give—you must quite understand that. If you are prepared to be satisfied with an idea"—

"Only give me yourself," said the Marquis, trying hard to disbelieve in the condition. "Only let me prove by the devotion of my life and every moment of it"—

"Prove what you will, you cannot give life to what is dead.

You must come down to the prosaic, or I must recal my consent, and say 'No,' once for all. Can you be happy without any love at all? You are a strange being, if you can, and if you cannot, I shall make your life miserable."

"I can do anything for your sake."

"Without any return, now or in the future? Think what that means, and then, if you are wise, you will think no more of me."

"If that is being wise, let me be and always remain, a fool. What have I done, that you should recal your consent?"

"I don't, I only advise you. If you are prepared to be satisfied with no return whatsoever, I have nothing more to say. Without hope, reckless of consequences, I gave my consent in a fit of sheer desperation, and I hold myself bound by it, if you persist in your insane offer, I ask you again—are you prepared to be satisfied with no return whatever to all this devotion that you suppose yourself to feel?"

"I am, if you can give none," he said hurriedly and with much effort. "I can hope against hope for your sake."

"Be it so then!" said Ida. "You are responsible for the consequences."

There was a dead silence, which was broken at last by the entrance of the courier carrying a cloak. Lady Dytechley had returned and gone to her room. The Marquis remembering the pet project, began to move; but he

remembered also that time and place are important details in a wedding, whatever its consequences may be, and he suggested rather timidly that they were so.

"I ought to be at home very soon," he said, "for some important business, unfortunately—in less than a fortnight in fact—only that seems impossible."

"I don't care," said Ida impatiently. "Settle it yourself. I have nothing to do with it."

The Marquis, thinking that silence was the safest answer, retired with outward dignity, hoping that the persuasive powers of his devotion would at last soften her. He had not yet learned that Englishwomen, though their eyes are not black, as a rule can be dangerous when they are *in this humour won*.

He had hardly left the scene of his unenviable success when Lady Dytchley reappeared, looking ruffled and anxious. Her face was red—it was indeed, and her breathing short. The train of her dress jerked its way into the room, and folded itself double when she stood to speak.

"You were right," she said. "He has quite got over it—quite."

"Who has got over what?" said Ida carelessly.

"Why you know where I have been; and I am sure you have complained often enough about his venturing to propose."

"Yes, of course. What of him?"

"Well, I say, that after all the fuss he made, he has quite got over your refusing him."

"I don't see how that can be. There was nothing to get over."

"I don't understand you at all, and haven't for some time. You don't seem to care about anything."

"Naturally. I told you how it would be; and so it is. But I can't see what there is to care about. If he had anything to get over, and has got over it, so much the better for him."

"Yes; but he needn't have shown it in that way, as if he were doing it on purpose, and before half a dozen chattering people, who do nothing but mind other people's business, and carry it about with all sorts of additions."

"But what did he do?"

"Well, it was Lady Oxborough's fault; and the girls were

worse than she was, talking all the time to other people and making it evident, as if they hardly knew me. And she made herself as disagreeable as she could be, and he kept on flirting with a great forward girl—I don't know who she was—making me look like a fool, after it all, when she had been so anxious for it."

"It doesn't signify to me now what she was, nor what he was, is or may be. His name has been a sound of evil omen to me from the moment I set foot on board the Folkestone steamer; and when all was over with me, and the future utterly void of hope or interest of any kind, I heard it continually mentioned, even up to half an hour ago, in terms of praise that drove me to make sure of not hearing it again."

"You may feel sure of it—indeed, you may. You shall never be worried about him again."

"I know that, but not as you mean."

"Oh! but it *must* be the same, for my only wish about it is what yours must be. Do you know, I have been thinking it all over a great deal, and—and I feel sure there is some mistake about Everard—something that would put a different construction on his letter."

"No. There can be no other construction of that last sentence. I remember it, every word, with such dreadful distinctness."

"Yes, but—you know"—

"Every word is before me, as if written in letters of fire. Listen! He said, '*I really do not care, and cannot see the beauty you speak of.*' I never wanted him to see any beauty, but only to love me as I was. It is impossible to love without preferring the sight of the loved one to any other. No woman, worthy of the name, can endure having any one else preferred, *even by the eyes*. I could get over the rest—his writing about me in that way to a comparative stranger, or even what he says about the fortune—but not *that*. That is sufficient of itself, and with all the rest—his silence, the indifference he showed after we had left home, when he went to Netherwood and found us gone—of which you have so often reminded me—his never coming or taking any notice of either of my two last letters, his saying nothing when you accused him of not caring for me and warned him that you should consider him as disengaged—you told me so yourself—it all hangs together. I must be madder than

misery has made me, if I could delude myself into imagining a shadow of hope. Don't torture me any more by talking of hopes that have no foundation. All is over now. A few minutes ago I chose, in my despair, the only course you had left me, to escape from hearing any more of Lady Oxborough and her son."

"Good gracious! What have you done?" exclaimed Lady Dytchley, feeling as if she had been pricked all over with red-hot needles.

"I have accepted the Marquis Moncalvo," said Ida, with startling distinctness.

Lady Dytchley bounded a full inch off the ground, and her figure, inflated perhaps by increase of breathing, made no audible impression on it when the attraction of gravity brought her down again.

"O Ida! For shame!" she gasped out, reddening more and more at each exclamation. "So soon, too!—and after all you have said!"

"You never thought of that," said Ida, "when I implored you to have pity on me, and not talk at me and work, all day long, to break off my marriage, before you had any cause for it in reason or justice."

"Well, but I have acknowledged I was wrong. What can I say more? I—I can't believe—I really can't—can't. Oh!—when you think of it!—and you won't care the least for him—you know you won't."

"Of course not. If I could, the history of my life would have been altogether different, and I should be different."

"But why think of *him*?"

"My dear mother! you must mean why did he think of me."

"No. I don't care what he thought of. I meant, why did you accept him? So very wrong of him."

"You didn't think it wrong of the other, who knew I was engaged."

"No, he didn't; but never mind. I am accused of everything, I know. You *must* see how sly it was of him—to show no signs of anything, and then propose all at once, when you were not in a state to know your own mind. And you don't know it now, and you will find it so—you will, indeed, if you go on in that way. Now why did you accept him?"

"Because he had behaved well before, when the model young man"——

"Ida, Ida! Is it right to go on like this?"

"I don't know. Right and wrong have been made to change places so often since the day we dined at Bramscote"——

"Oh! oh! If it's to come to that"——

"And all the curious things that went on when you were upstairs."

"I won't hear any more. Oh! you ought to be ashamed."

"I can't help it. I am driven to say these things, and I might say much more. You wanted to know why I accepted him, and I answered that he had behaved well when the model did not. But I had other reasons besides. No one else would be satisfied to marry a woman who tells him, to begin with, that she neither does nor ever can, nor ever will care about him at all. I told him so. I told him that, if he was satisfied with an idea, he was welcome to it. He persisted, and he shall have it. You can't say anything against him in a worldly point of view?"

"No; but that isn't it. Surely you must see that such a sudden thing"——

"What you wished for would have been as sudden, and sooner by six weeks or more."

"There it is again. Haven't I told you again and again that I was wrong? Do you want me to go down on my knees and confess it in a white sheet, like the Roman Catholics? I say that it's abominable. I never could have believed such a thing of you. To go and engage yourself like that, without a particle of affection—oh!"

"It isn't my fault, Do you wish me to marry ever, or not?"

"Why yes of course. What do you mean?"

"I mean, that if you do, you must not complain of the bargain. Love is out of the question."

"Then don't bring misery on yourself by marrying him. Do you suppose he will endure such treatment? He may say so now, because he doesn't believe that you are in earnest, but no man would bear"——

"He *must* bear it. A woman who has lost all hope is more unmanageable than a wild beast, for she has nothing to fear. I was once gentle and loving, as you know. You

know how I became what I am. Do you wish me to die?"

"Die. Why *will* you frighten me so?"

"Because I want you to understand what the choice is. My heart must either break or harden. I must either pine to death, or keep myself alive by the excitement of resenting my wrongs, as people live on stimulants; and that is what I am doing. I made no choice: I was carried along by a blind instinct, and I must follow it."

"Now don't talk so wickedly. Do you know, you are letting yourself get into a very dreadful state of mind."

"I know it; but if I were not, it would be in no state at all. My mind would follow my heart, and be nowhere. You would hardly wish that."

"Worse and worse," thought Lady Dytchley. "What *can* I do? Nothing, noth"—

The word broke in two, with a shock that sickened her like the sudden pitching of a ship into the trough of the sea. Conscience, aroused by danger, spoke out and said:—

"Do? Rather undo. Undo your own work. Correct your wilful mistatements. Tell her what you suppressed. The letter would have had no force without your preparations and commentaries and continual perversion of truth, always in the same sense."

"Why did I show it to Ida?" she thought.

"Did I believe that the letter meant what it appeared to mean? I am afraid that, perhaps, I may have been led to persuade myself so, by leaning too much to what seemed the wiser thing. I am sure I tried to do for the best, but I was—mistaken."

Conscience was not satisfied with this first genuine attempt at self-examination.

"Undo your own work," it said. "You *can*. Tell her what you suppressed, and you will undo it. Tell her why Everard said nothing when you told him that you considered him disengaged—how you refused to hear him, how you made use of his silence for your own purposes, and suppressed all he *did* say."

"Well, I couldn't help it—I acted for the best, as things were," she tried to think; but the image of Everard, as he stood before her in the library at Netherwood, pleading for the bare justice that would have made her present position impossible, rose up before her, with the vividness of reality,

and silenced the thought. She was a woman, after all, and the completeness of his heroic manhood, strong, gentle, beautiful in every sense, impressed her as she had never been impressed before. Prejudice had been driven out, and he appeared to her memory as he was.

"This misunderstanding is intolerable, she said. "We must go home at once and make an end of it."

"There is no misunderstanding," said Ida, "and I will not go home. I will not set foot on English ground till my fate is fixed as *he* made it."

"Till when?"

"Till I am married to the man that you put in my way to tempt my recklessness."

"Ida, Ida! Is this the way to behave to your mother?"

"It is not; and I never did behave so, as you know. I was always obedient and dutiful and affectionate to you. You did everything in your power to make me lose the Grace of God by neglect; and now that I have lost it through your efforts, you expect me to act as if I had not. Had I obeyed God, I should now obey you. You have chosen my course for me, marked it out, left me no other. I am following it. I have nothing more to say on the subject, and I can hear nothing more."

"But surely you will come to England first. You can't do such a thing as—you know, really! Do be reasonable."

"I am not reasonable, and I should lose my reason altogether if I tried to be so. I will not go to England first. What is to be must be as soon as possible. I am quite serious. Please, don't say any more about it."

"But, for the sake of appearances, if for nothing else"—

"I really must go, if you say any more," said Ida, walking towards the door.

"You will be talked about so—you will indeed."

"I should have been talked about much more, and justly if I had broken my faith, as you wished me to do."

"I know that I was wrong about that: everyone is sometimes. Do stay a moment"—

"It is too late," said Ida. Nothing can change my miserable fate now, nor make it more endurable."

She shut the door, and Lady Dytchley remained standing in the middle of the room, as if rooted to the spot by the force of two contrary attractions. Conscience urged her to

tell what she had suppressed ; pride, under a thin veil of parental dignity, held her back, and shame paralysed her better instincts. There was a short struggle, if alternate yieldings to right and wrong can be dignified by the name, and then procrastination came in with its maxims of caution. Tears, copious and comforting, followed after a while, generalising the difficulty and softening its features, till at length she dried her eyes, remarking to herself in silent thought, " After all, he *is* a man of position, and he isn't a bigoted Roman Catholic like Everard. I daresay she will get to care for him, after all."

While she was consoling herself with the profound idea that a bad Catholic is safer to deal with than a good one, the object of her equivocal compliment stood before his dressing-case, feeling uncomfortable as to the future of the letters there detained. Ida's two letters to Everard could be posted at Florence too late to be of any avail, and the post would bear the blame ; but what was to be done with the seven that she ought to have received, five from Everard and two from Elfrida ? What would circumstantial evidence make of those half dozen miscarrying within a fortnight, all addressed to her, all coming to hand after she had been *in this humour won* through their suppression ? Certainly they must be burnt ; but what then ? Fire, that purifies gold, could neither purify the deed, nor annihilate inferences. Ida would know, some time or other, that those seven letters had been sent. What would she think of their disappearance, in connection with the fact that he was in the habit of fetching and carrying letters for them at Florence ? A great fear came over him, such as he had never felt before, and a sense of shame, that reproached his will, without moving it.

" We must keep ourselves away from her family for some time," he thought. " She will appreciate my devotion, after a while, and think no more about past annoyances." Then, going into his sitting-room, he put the seven letters— five from Everard and two from Elfrida, in a scaldino, and holding a lighted candle to each in succession, stood over them till their ashes were mingled with the smouldering charcoal.

But what was to be done with the four half sheets of Everard's letter to him ? Their fate was still undecided. Should he burn them all ? or keep the two, that made his

case, and consume the other two in the scaldino? He asked himself no questions, but hurried back, brought out the unavailable part of the letter, and applied the lighted candle as before.

"*Causa finita est*," he said with an uneasy smile; "but I have not decided it. The result is against him, but not by an act of my will. Events took the power of choice from me, and they did so when I was longing most for reconciliation with the Church. How can it be wrong to follow that impulse?"

Conscience protested, suggesting in a feeble and tentative manner that his good dispositions would be more trustworthy if they had appeared under better auspices; but he said, "what is done is done!" and went into his bedroom to lock the dressing-case.

There remained in it the two selected half-sheets and the two letters from Ida to Everard. He decided that the arrival of her first letter must be timed accurately, so that Everard could not be in Rome till the day after the wedding. The second must be posted two days later, to make the delay seem accidental. As both would be posted in Florence while he would be in Rome, who could suspect manipulation on his part? His confidential servant would go quietly, very quietly, to Florence, for the purpose, and return in time for the wedding. "*E poi*" he began to say in thought; but a black cloud came across the prospect, and a misgiving that would not be silenced interrupted his pleasant fancies ere he had time to indulge in them. What, if Ida should refuse to keep herself away from her family till she had forgotten the wonderful derangement of postal punctuality at Florence? What, if her memory should prove longer than her absence? A cold perspiration was the answer, and then a voice within said:—

"You will have to live in ceaseless terror, despising yourself, deceiving the object of your unhallowed love, the wife whom you have *in this humour won*."





CHAPTER XXIII



WHEN November was within a few days of its close and Lady Dytchley neither came nor wrote, Sir Richard felt, in the words of an old chronicle, *consternatus et tremebundus*, being apprehensive, not of illness or accidents, but of some new and unforeseen plot in which he would find himself playing a supernumerary part against the little will that he possessed. He was quite well now, and had been out hunting twice; but the fear of "sparks flying upward" was upon him, repressing his cheerfulness and feebly exciting a general idea of resistance.

"Upon my word, I'll do something!" he said to himself as he verified the date in an almanac. "The twenty-fourth, and there they are! Not even a letter from her; so that I don't know where to write. I'll do something—I will, indeed!"

It was not the first time that he had confided this cautious resolve to his own keeping; but he went a little further now, emboldened by the conviction that resistance would be the lesser evil, even to himself.

"I won't go on so," he said, taking three letters off the writing-table to put them into the box in the hall. "I won't have it. 'I'll do something or other. I won't stand it. I'll be—I mean I won't. I am half sorry that I sent Elfrida to Hazeley, to be confirmed there instead of here. Well, it can't be done again, and so there it is; but upon my word—by the by, she'll be back directly. There she is! I hear the carriage coming.'"

Whilst he was putting the letters into the box Elfrida arrived.

"Well ! here you are : " said he. " I have been watching for you. Everard is going off directly. He expects Hubert Freville at Freville Chase to-morrow, and will bring him here to dine and sleep the day after. A good fellow, very, and—has a lot in him—very superior for his age, uncommonly. I've got to see a man on business. Here comes Everard. So you are off. Well ! mind you come the day after to-morrow. We shall hear soon what day they come back. Good-bye for the present." "Stay," he added, making a half turn when he had gone some distance, "I'll drive with you as far as the village ; but I've got to see a man first. He then disappeared through a door that led to the justice room.

Elfrida drew back into a corner of the hall and motioned Everard to come nearer. "How soon must you go?" she said.

"As soon as possible. I ought to be half way there by this time."

"So kind and thoughtful of you to wait for me. I wanted to see you so much. No letter come?"

"Not one."

"Do try not to feel it so dreadfully. My mother told us, when she wrote last, that we must not be surprised if we were to be a long time without hearing."

"Yes ; but she wrote that more than three weeks ago, the beginning of November. It is impossible that they can have been all that time travelling. They must either have remained at Florence, or gone somewhere else, or stopped at places on the way home. In any case they could have written. If they had been ill, you would have heard from the maid or the courier or some one."

"The letters must have gone wrong. The courier forgot to post them. Ida is certain to have written."

"He may have done so once, but not repeatedly. I have not heard from her for nearly six weeks—five weeks and four days."

"The time is long, and seems longer ; but often when one is at a distance, impediments arise that no one would have dreamt of. For instance, Ida may have written to you three or four days before my mother wrote, and her letter may have gone astray, either through the post, or by the carelessness of the person who was to post it, or through some accident that might easily happen. Then my mother may

have thought that, as she had told us not to expect letters at this time, there was no need to be particular about writing since. You can have no idea of the work and bother that travelling entails on ladies, with all the different things they have to wear and get packed, and the small parcels that keep coming in, and the people waiting to be paid, just as you are looking over the hotel bill. Then you arrive at some place, tired and stupified, and find neither pens, ink nor paper; and all the next day you are dragged about sight-seeing, till you are off again to stop somewhere else and go through the same process. You will find that they have been travelling home in that sort of way, stopping here and there, and being tired and stupified all the while. It was sure to be so; for my mother always fusses when she is travelling, and tries to do more than she can. Depend upon it, we shall hear to-morrow or next day from Paris, or more likely from Boulogne, and see them a few hours later."

Everard smiled faintly, and said, "You have made out a good case. But the time is too long to have been filled up with the bothers and interruptions of travelling, unless they remained at Florence a week or ten days after your mother wrote last; and if they did, there was plenty of time for writing to say when they would start. Packing and paying bills would take time, but not the whole of every day for a week."

"That depends upon circumstances that we don't know."

"We don't indeed, and I must know them; but there is the dogcart at the door."

"And I haven't said half I wanted to say. I shall see you the day after to-morrow, but for so short a time."

"To tell you the truth, I shall come back to stay, if they have not returned or written by that time. Prudence keeps me from going after them myself—you know why—unless I am fairly driven to do so; but Hubert kindly offered to go, and I may have to accept his offer."

"But what do you suppose can"—

"I really don't know. One becomes anxious after so much delay. We had better not talk about it. We shall know more, perhaps, by the day after to-morrow."

"Yes; but you look so dreadfully ill, so unlike yourself."

"It must be the fog. I am well enough."

"No, you are not. You can't deceive me. I don't like your going to-day. I feel as if"—

"I am ready," said Sir Richard, coming through the distant door and walking across the hall with as much cheerfulness as his legs could represent in opposition to his feelings. "Are your things in the dogcart? I see they are. I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

They drove off. Elfrida walked slowly upstairs, reviewing what had happened and not happened in the last three, not to say six weeks, and gradually disbelieving the good case that she had made out.

Sir Richard drove with Everard as far as the first turn of the road beyond the village. He spoke very little, but muttered from time to time fragmentary statements of his intention to do something. When the dogcart stopped, he said,—

"Keep up, you know. Never say die. I don't mean that exactly; but you know what I mean. I am going to do something, if I don't see them or hear from them in a day or two. I won't stand it any longer. But I want to know where they are."

"I must find that out," said Everard. "Will you stand by me when I have?"

"That I will. You may depend on me," said Sir Richard, jumping out of the dogcart. "Now, keep up your spirits—won't you?"

"Certainly"; answered Everard. "That is all I want."

*Talia voce refert, curisque ingentibus ager
Spem vultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem.*

Sir Richard walked away, saying to himself:—

"I wish I had attended to what Father Merivale said in such a friendly way. It would have been all right long ago if I had; and now I look like a fool, not knowing what to say when people ask me where they are. Why couldn't she, whatever she was about—and I'm sure I can't tell what—why couldn't she tell me where they are? One could do something then. Why couldn't she write?—Why couldn't she write?"

The reason was that her will had collapsed before Ida's desperate resolution. She had debated within herself more than once, during that day and many succeeding days,

whether she should write to him about it, or wait and see what would turn up; but the latter course always recommended itself to her with the greater force, and always in these words:

"What is the use of worrying him about a thing that can't last? She can't go on with it when she comes to herself; and it would be such a thing to tell in a letter. One couldn't." And then a very prickly heat, of an aggravated kind, would settle the question, persuading her to wait for something "to turn up." Sir Richard, whose little weak will was under the bracing action of necessity, would have had the best of it then.

He walked about the grounds till it was quite dark, and then fidgeted about the house, muttering broken sentences. At dinner he scarcely spoke. After dinner he retired to the library, and then was seen no more till the next morning.

"One might as well be alone," he said to himself towards the end of the evening. I couldn't talk to poor Elfrida, with this—I don't know what—hanging over one, and all her mother's fault; and she couldn't talk to me. There's such an awkwardness about it. I must go to bed, though it's only ten o'clock. I can't sit up doing nothing, and I don't understand books, and if I tried to smoke, I should only make myself sick. I owe all this to that red whiskered fellow, for sticking there on the rumble when he could have prevented the blow-up and all that has come of it. What's this book that Everard left here? 'Gnostic Gems.' I suppose it's about jewellery and that sort of thing—a queer subject for him, but one never knows what these literary fellows will make out of things. I'll have a look at it. What in the world is this? 'Abraxas!' compounded of 'ab' (that's Latin) or 'af' (that's gibberish) and 'rak'—why, that's what they call brandy in India or somewhere. I can't make head or tail of it. I must go to bed."

He did so, and quickly fell into a sound sleep, during which he dreamt that he had made everything right by shooting the red-whiskered man into space out of a plaything gun. When he awoke early in the morning, he said, "What a pity that one can't," and went to sleep again, oversleeping himself so much, after the fatigues of the big resolve, that it was nearly nine o'clock before he was fairly awake.

Everard, who had not slept at all, was then on his way.

from the chapel to the dining-room at Freville Chase, followed soon afterwards by Father Merivale.

"Thank you for coming," he said. "I wanted to see you. I feel—I can't tell why—as if I should have to go off somewhere."

He had hardly entered the dining-room when his eyes were fixed on one of the three or four letters that lay on the breakfast table. He recognised Ida's handwriting, even at that distance, and bounding up to the table, tore open the envelope. Scrawled over two pages were these words :

They have told wicked stories about you. Do, do come here at once. My mother wishes you to come, and says she shall believe it if you do not. Of course I know what a wicked falsehood it is, but I am almost glad of anything that will bring you. I have been so very miserable ever since that dreadful day at Netherwood.

The signature was almost illegible, and the letter not dated. The postmark was "Florence." Everard rang the bell and, holding up the letter, said to Father Merivale :—

"You see why I must go. I have barely time to catch the train by galloping all the way to Lyneham. Will you kindly tell Hubert what has happened, and ask him to stay till I come back, and keep him here, and ask him to ride to Netherwood and tell Elfrida where and why I am gone."

He rushed out of the room, and saying to the old butler, who was coming in, "Thunderbolt to be at the door for me directly. Be in the hall when I come down," ran upstairs to get money. After doing so he wrote on a slip of paper some directions about sending his servant on to Florence with his luggage, gave it to the butler as he passed him in the hall, and ran along the courtyard to meet the horse. Meeting Thunderbolt just outside the gatehouse he jumped on him and started for Lyneham to catch the express train. The distance, in a straight line across country, was about five miles, and, as far as he could guess, not having a moment to spare for looking at his watch, it would be nearly impossible to reach the station in time ; but, on the other hand, neither he nor Thunderbolt were disposed to accept that view of the case, and the ground was not heavy. He trotted round the eastern side of the house, raced over the grass, and trotted down a hill at the back. Cantering up

and down the gentle slopes on the other side, he let Thunderbolt go across the flat at his own pace, taking the fences as they came. All went well till he was within half a mile of Lyneham, when he saw in front of him a newly-bound hedge on the top of the bank, with a drop on the other side. He must either take it, or go round and be late. The pace had begun to tell ; but Ida was on the other side, helpless without him. He made a short aspiration and crammed the horse at it. Thunderbolt pulled himself together, and just cleared the hedge ; but the drop was too much for him, and he fell forward on his knees. By an extreme effort of strength Everard saved him from rolling over, and scrambling up, he galloped across the field, taking a low hedge into the road that led up to the station. The last bell was ringing as he turned in at the gate. What was to be done with Thunderbolt ? The ostler from the White Hart was coming out, having just brought a horse to go by a later train. "Take care of him," said Everard, making a rush at the door. The door was locked and the guard was blowing his whistle. He ran round, vaulted on an iron railing, and made for the nearest carriage. The train was beginning to move.

"You can't get in, sir, now," said a railway official, planting himself in front of the door.

Everard made no answer, but sent him staggering across the platform and took a header through the window, to the astonishment of an old gentleman who was reading the "Daily Telegraph."

"I beg your pardon," he said. "It was a matter of life and death to me."

"You seem to have had a hard ride," said his travelling companion as soon as he had recovered his breath.

"Yes. I had to race for it across country and leave my luggage to follow."

"I hope you have not far to go without a great-coat."

"As far as Florence."

At this information his fellow traveller, who had felt inclined to offer him a big Inverness cape that lay on the seat, began to feel suspicious of bailiffs with writs, and retired within himself.

About half-past twelve Hubert arrived at Freville Chase. Father Merivale, who had heard the sound of wheels, came out to meet him.

"Everard is on his way to Florence," he said, "and his servant with the luggage has just gone after him. I stayed at home to tell you, and to say from him that he hopes you will wait here till he comes back. He went off this morning at a moment's notice, in consequence of an urgent letter from Miss Dytchley."

"What on earth can"—

"He had no time to explain anything. He only held up the first page of the letter before me, and said that he wished you to wait till he returned and to tell Miss Elfrida Dytchley why and where he had gone."

"I will ride off there directly: but do you think there is anything wrong?"

"I am afraid—but he had no time to tell me. Lady Dytchley wishes him to go there: but one has no confidence in her."

"What do you advise, then? I am strongly inclined to go after him, and show her, in case of need, that things can be made known unpleasantly."

"I wish you would—I was going so far as to ask you. He looked this morning as if he had not slept for a week, and he started without any breakfast, to race across country, catch the express if he could, and travel to Florence by day and night in this bitter weather, without even a great-coat."

"I will stir up Sir Richard and frighten him into taking action, by showing him that it will be the only safe course even for himself. I'll go at once and catch him at luncheon."

"I shall hope a little and pray hard that you may succeed. I tried to persuade him so myself—a most disagreeable position for a priest to put himself in—and failed utterly. But his eyes must have been opened since then. Besides, he would pay more attention to what you said, as a man of the world."

"I hope so; but I don't see why. You know as much of the world as any one."

"I do know something about it, but he wouldn't think I did."

"I daresay. The less one knows, the less one believes in other people knowing, except when they are in the wrong. I'll ride off at once. Is there a 'Bradshaw' anywhere, to tell when the Folkestone boat goes?"

"In the hall, I think. I will look it out for you. You can hardly be back from Netherwood in time to start before the evening."

"Shall you be at home when I come back?"

"I am afraid not; but I will leave word about the boat."

Hubert went to the stables, found there his own horses, which had arrived the day before, and mounting one of them, cantered off towards Netherwood to stir up Sir Richard.

Sir Richard, however, if appearances could be relied on, required no stirring. At breakfast he had thrown out dark hints that something would happen if nothing came, and afterwards he gave strict orders, more than once, that someone should ride to the respectable market town of Puddelford, and bring out any letters that might have come by the second post.

Hubert reached Netherwood a little before two o'clock, and finding Elfrida at home, waited for Sir Richard without any effort of patience. Time passed at its own pace, and seemed long because each moment was emphatic. Had the occasion of his visit been any other than what it was, he must have betrayed more than ought yet to be disclosed. An hour went by, and the time appeared to stand still while it lasted. Longing to express what had possessed him, he controuled the inclination without any consciousness of suspense, as if doubts and uncertainties had no place between them.

About three o'clock Sir Richard walked into the room with a letter from Lady Dytchley in his hand.

"Here it is at last!" he said, "and about time it was. Ah! I am glad you have come early. But you had better stop to-night, instead of going back in the dark and cold. I meant to have told Everard so yesterday. Where is he?"

"Between London and Folkestone, by this time," said Hubert.

"You don't mean"——

"Yes. He started suddenly, in consequence of a letter he had by this morning's post, and raced across country to catch the express at Lyneham. A servant left with the luggage just before I came."

Sir Richard had already opened the letter, and he now began

to read it, but had not read much when, contrary to his habits and principles, he uttered a big word of imprecation several times in a loud voice, applying the same to all whom it might possibly concern and to the Marquis Moncalvo by name.

"Look here!" he said, throwing the letter on the table, and repeating the big words in a lower tone to himself.

"Read it. I can't stand any more of it. Did anybody ever hear of such a thing as this? I won't have it. She must be mad, and Ida must be stark, staring mad. I can't make it out. Do try if you can understand it. Read it right out. Never mind *him*."

Elfrida looked at the letter, and turned so pale that Hubert instinctively seized it."

"Yes. Do read it for me," she said. "I don't think I can."

His face was as pale as hers; but he made a strong effort for her sake, and read as follows:—

"*Hotel—I can't make out what—Rome—and the rest. I have been so ill and worried about it all*"—and so on. God help us! What is this? "*It was all Everard's fault, for he never came, or wrote, or did anything, though she begged him so hard to come, and told him how dreadfully distressed she was about it, and that I was so very, very anxious for him to come and make it right, for I hoped, of course that the whole thing was a mistake and I hope so now, but I cannot tell how it can be, as he has taken no notice at all, which does look so bad*"——

"Why he wrote, and wrote, and wrote, and couldn't get any answer," said Sir Richard. What the—? But go on."

"*I must say though*" read Hubert—"it is so dreadful for all of us to think that he could carry off an Italian girl before all the old servants at Freville Chase, who of course would make the best of it and keep it quiet if they could, but who can keep such a scandal secret in an open lane and people coming home from their work?"

"The Marquis Moncalvo must have set that about," said Elfrida. "The Italian girl is a middle-aged woman from Chase End, formerly nurse of Everard's half-brother; and the Marquis's confidential servant was carrying her off somewhere because she accused his master of at least contriving the child's death, when Everard, happening to pass by,

rescued her. Evidently the Marquis was afraid that the story would get abroad, and so he tried to screen himself by setting this about."

"I saw long ago that he was at mischief, though I couldn't tell what," said Hubert. "There is something very odd about these letters miscarrying here both ways. It was he who pocketed the letter she sent by half-witted Tim—he said he forgot it—" *And then (Lady Dytchley goes on to say)—‘and then to have no answer from him when she wrote twice and told him how miserable she was! It drove her wild, and no wonder, I am sure, not that I am defending her for accepting the Marquis Moncalvo in a fit of temper, who I must say has behaved very well about it, and I told her it was not a proper state of mind to be in and not a proper way to marry anybody, but she will do it. She was like a mad creature, and actually gave him to understand that she only marries him to spite Everard! How he can be satisfied with that I cannot think. I have really been so upset by it all and hoping from day to day to persuade her out of it, that I was quite unequal to write at first, and then I was so ill in consequence of the anxiety—all alone here with no one to help or advise! that I was laid up in bed for several days and now can hardly hold a pen. I am afraid you will not be able to do anything, she is so set upon it, so obstinate she is, and so fractious, you would never know her to be the same, but I am doing all I can to get her to put it off a day or two, and indeed, I am not fit to appear, I am so dreadfully ill with all this, as you may imagine, so that you may be in time if you come directly, but I have no hopes of your being able to do anything. It is very, very dreadful—and such a thing in the neighbourhood!—and they will all say it was my fault, as if I could have done such a thing!’*"

"Pish!" muttered Sir Richard. "As if she didn't go abroad with Lady Oxborough to do as bad! Go on. No! Let me look at it. It *must* be a hoax or a forgery. No, it isn't—it's her writing. What's next?"

"*It is a terrible blow, but it might have been worse. His family and position are all that could be wished, his character is quite unexceptionable, and he has a very large fortune. Yesterday he gave her a magnificent diamond tiara*"—

"D—n the tiara! I won't read any more. I'll be off now

as fast as they can pack. I wan't to have a word with the fellow, if I can catch him."

"Leave that to me," said Hubert in a low voice.

"I will not leave it to you," said Elfrida, a deep rose-colour mounting into her cheeks and fading away as quickly as it came. "I shall be there as soon as you; for if my father goes, I go, and my father is going. Leave me to tell him what he is. I know enough about him to threaten him with making public that which would ruin him, and I am quite capable of carrying out my threat, if need be. He deserves the worst that you could do, but you shall not do it. You are a Christian by desire, perhaps by baptism, and, I trust, will soon be in the one true Church. You shall not rush into a quarrel that would drag you into the danger of mortal sin."

"Well done, Elfrida!" said Sir Richard. "He musn't get himself into that sort of thing."

Elfrida, who had spoken in simple obedience to a right impulse, was instinctively troubled at hearing her words mentioned in connection with herself. She turned away her head, pretending to look for something on the table, and answered coldly, "the terrible importance of the case must plead my excuse for being so impertinent as to interfere."

"Don't say that," said Hubert, with very evident emotion. "I will do as you wish."

"And look here!" said Sir Richard, "Everard is the man to stop it. He has only to show his face—and he will be there before any of us."

"Very little before," said Hubert. "He will lose time by looking for them at Florence. But if you will allow me to advise, I should recommend your taking more time on the road. It would be sheer madness to take her from here to Rome without stopping, and wouldn't be safe even for you, after being laid up so long. I shall start this evening, and perhaps I shall be in Rome before Everard. If I am in time, there will be no difficulty at all. I shall only have to tell Miss Dytechley the truth, and the Marquis will have to get out of her way as quickly as he can. But, as she knows very little of me, I think you would do well to write a strong letter to her and entrust me with it."

"Quite right, quite right!" said Sir Richard. "Very kind and thoughtful of you. Then we'll start this evening,

and get on as well as we can. But we must see about getting off. We shall have very little time, for there is no nearer station than Lyneham to catch the express at."

Hubert rose to go, and said as he went, "We shall meet there then, and travel together part of the way. May I advise one more thing before I go? I think you had better telegraph to Lady Dytechley from Lyneham, to say that you are coming."

Sir Richard seized a pen and wrote :—

Your letter received this morning—first for several weeks. E. heard from her this morning—not dated, but post-mark Florence, first time for many weeks. He started instantly. The story you mention greatest lie ever invented. H. Fr. off to Rome as fast as possible to expose it, and him too, if necessary, and we follow as quickly as is prudent. She must be mad, and you too.—R. J. D., Neth.—shire, Nov. 25th.

"I think that will do," he said. "Will you get it off?"

Hubert put the paper into his pocket and hurried away. Elfrida went up to her room and rang the bell and opened wardrobes in hot haste. Sir Richard put money in his purse, and wished that he had begun a little sooner to "do something."





CHAPTER XXIV.



WHEN Hubert rode away from Netherwood Everard was paying his unticketed fare to the ticket-collector in London and not having any luggage, was just able to catch the tidal train. By this time he was beginning to feel how much he had taken out of himself.

"I have got a very bad chill," he thought; "but I can't stop for anything. I must try what a little brandy will do, as soon as I am on board."

He jumped out at Ashford and bought a Scotch plaid at the bookstall. It gave no warmth at all, and seemed as if it hung apart from him, having no perceptible weight. When he left the train he felt so stiff that he could hardly walk, and a strange kind of dizziness came over him, so that he had some difficulty in stepping on board. A stranger observed him as he staggered across the deck, and after watching his countenance for a minute or two, said, "You are ill. Can I be of any use to you?"

Everard looked at him, as through a very thin mist that moved in white waves.

"Thank you," he said. "I will take advantage of your kind offer, and ask you to steer me down the ladder. I am chilled and exhausted, and I want to see what a little brandy will do for me."

The stranger helped him down the ladder, and said, "A little will not be enough. I am not a doctor, but I know that much by experience. I don't wish to be an alarmist; but you must get a reaction, or it will go hard with you."

The steward brought a wineglass full of brandy, "Drink it off," said the stranger. "You will be surprised to find how little effect it has."

Everard drank the fiery liquid, and it tasted like very weak brandy and water. He drank a second, and then a third, and they went on deck.

"I feel more life in me now:" he said. "I begin to shiver, instead of feeling like a stone, as I did before."

"You really ought to stop at Boulogne and go to bed," said the stranger.

"I know that I ought; but I must go on, and sleep, if I can, in the train. I must eat something at Amiens."

"Have you far to go?"

"To Florence."

"You must have a remarkably fine constitution, or you wouldn't have picked up as you have: but you are running a great risk. I see, by the splashes of mud on your clothes, that you have been riding hard."

"Yes. I had to ride across country and jump into the train when it was moving off."

Thought the stranger, "There has been something more than that to bring such a man into such a condition."

"I am warmer now," thought Everard. "I shall be right enough presently." "What a beautiful moonlight night," he said.

"Yes, too beautiful," answered the stranger. "One turns from it as one turns from all that is beautiful, because one longs for the beautiful to last. But it all passes away, sooner or later, or we pass from it. In a few years we cease to be, and in a few more years the greatest works of art will perish."

"Yes, as to their external manifestation," said Everard, "because they are composite and therefore corruptible. But how about the types?"

The stranger paused in a hesitating manner seeming puzzled and anxious. "I suppose," he said, "that the type of the realized idea remains more or less, as such, ideally in the artist, as long as he lives and has his faculties."

"And then," said Everard, "where is it? Unless we deny that God *is* in any intelligible sense of the word, we must believe that He permanently knows all things, and that without Him as the First cause of all things, no work

of art could be designed by anyone. Therefore the types of all things actual and possible must be in the Divine Mind as architypes. And in as much as these architypes are not composite things that perish by resolving into their elements but are clearly non-material, how can they with propriety of language be said to perish? Does it seem reasonable to suppose that God forgets what He has always known, or impossibly contradicting Himself, knows it otherwise than as it is?"

"You have set me thinking," said the stranger. "I have never been so interested by anything that I ever heard from anyone. I should be thankful to have an hour's conversation with you about such things."

They did talk but in a little while, an unexpected friend called the stranger away.

"I wonder who he is?" thought Everard. "I should like to know."

But he never did know. The superfluous friend continued to interrupt the moment of landing, when luggage becomes a fixed idea in the minds of travellers. Everard having no luggage to think of, looked about for his unknown friend, but only saw the back of his ulster in the distance.

In the Paris train he found himself travelling in the same carriage with an abbé, an infidel *commis voyageur*, and an ill-favoured Englishwoman, of a general age, who had a bagful of tracts for the benefit of any Italian dweller in Rome that might be disposed to better his fortunes by being converted to the doctrine of "essentials." The abbé was saying his office. The *commis voyageur* raised the point of his snub nose, in contempt of all prejudices. The tract-distributor obtruded her chin and, after a little preliminary conversation with Everard, relative to her wares, informed him that Popery and Infidelity went in paralled lines.

"They do," said Everard, "for they never meet."

"I am afraid we shall not agree," she said taking up a newspaper. He thought so, too, and took out his rosary. The *commis voyageur* glared at him by way of protest, but, producing no effect, began to pare his nails with a pen-knife.

At the first station the abbé got out. The tract-distributor was half asleep, and the *commis voyageur* snoring. Everard tried to sleep, but failed to do so, though he had not slept at all the night before. The shivering had passed away, but

fever had followed, and burning thirst, so that, when the train stopped at Amiens, he had no inclination for food.

"But I *must* eat," he said to himself, and drinking a large tumblerful of seltzer water with brandy in it, he made a resolute attack on some *galantine de veau*. The seltzer water quenched his feverish thirst, and the brandy in it enabled him to eat. By a great effort and the help of more seltzer water with brandy, he finished the bit of *galantine*, and went back to the train, feeling that he had been just saved from breaking down.

"If I could only sleep," he thought, "I should do."

He never slept at all during the whole journey, but went on, supported by the fever which increased as he went. When he reached Florence his eyes looked unnaturally large, and he had two red spots on each cheek-bone. It was half-past four o'clock in the morning. He went to the nearest hotel and, with some difficulty, effected an entrance.

"I want a warm bath and breakfast," he said.

The porter looked at his tumbled clothes covered with mud, and said that the hotel was full.

"I see what you mean," said Everard, pulling out his purse. "Have the bill made out first, and charge what you like. I must have the bath and the breakfast. Be quick."

His manner impressed the man, and in half an hour the bath was ready. At six he breakfasted, and then heard Mass at the nearest church.

"I shall be able to get in soon," he thought, and see her at last.

It was about seven o'clock when he stopped at the hotel where Ida had written to him. He walked in and said to a waiter, "have the goodness to show me Lady Dytechley's sitting-room and send her my card by her lady's maid."

"Mylady Deetchlee," answered the waiter, "went to Rome a fortnight ago."

Everard felt a sudden chill at the heart. The fever spots left his cheeks, which became as white and as cold as alabaster.

"Impossible!" he said. "I had a letter from them in England four days ago, written from here, and saying that I should find them here."

The waiter shrugged his shoulders and called the padrone, who confirmed the fact.

"Do you know where she is, in Rome?" said Everard. "And will you have the goodness to tell me when the next train goes?"

The padrone disappeared through a door, and coming back in a few moments, informed him on both points. Everard took the last card out of his card-case and wrote Lady Dytechley's direction on it.

"My servant will be here to-morrow," he said, "with my luggage. Will you give him this?"

He then left the hotel, jumped into the first public carriage he met, and just caught the train.

In the railway carriage there were four passengers:—a Monsignore, an elderly Englishman, a French lady in deep mourning, and a German Jew of sinister aspect, whose particular part in the comico-tragic drama of modern progress was not apparent.

"In self-defence I must talk and keep on talking," thought Everard. "If I allow myself to think, between here and Rome, it will go hard with me in one way or another."

He began to talk, first with the Monsignore, then with the French lady, and then with both. The conversation lasted till they had passed several stations. The German Jew gave a divided attention to his newspaper and to what they said, but showed no disposition to converse. The Englishman had a book in his hand, but his attention was fixed on Everard, and he appeared to wait for an opportunity of speaking to him. At last, when subjects of conversation had become few and far between, he took advantage of a pause, and said:—

"I must apologise for plunging so abruptly *in medias res*, but I can't find it in my conscience to do otherwise. You ought to be in bed, instead of travelling."

"I certainly feel very ill," said Everard; "but I can't measure what I feel, for I have no recollection of being ill at all, since I had the measles, or something of the sort, when I was a very small child. I thought I could stand anything, and in fact I never felt fatigue before; but I have caught a bad chill."

"Excuse my question—I am a physician. How did you get the chill?"

"By riding very hard across country to catch an express train 150 miles the other side of London, and travelling ever

since without a greatcoat. To make it worse, I started without breakfast, and had no food till one o'clock the next morning, at Amiens, except some brandy on board the steamer. I was so chilled that I had to drink three glasses of it, and then I was not warm. The only effect was to make me shiver instead of feeling stagnant."

The physician took a card-case from his pocket, and wrote something on it. "I advise you to put up there," he said, "on account of the situation and the quietness. You are in a high fever, and not unlikely to have inflammation of the lungs. You must have medical advice, and if you don't know who to send for, I can tell you. I had better write it on the back of the card. And now, let me advise you to keep as quiet as possible during the remainder of the journey, and sleep, if you can."

Everard thanked him, took the card, and shutting his eyes, tried to follow the advice as far as possible. Sleep was out of the question, and restlessness grew when he sought rest. The printed name on the card engaged his attention for a few moments. "I have a dim recollection of that name—Dr. Ranston," he thought; "but where and when I can't remember. I ought to tell him my name, he has been so kind. I will—afterwards."

"There has been some predisposing cause for this," thought Dr. Ranston. "His mind is in a fever as well as his body. The chill and the want of rest could hardly have brought a man so very strong and sound as he is into such a condition; and besides, there is clearly something on his mind, that no strength of will can master. I must find out who he is, and whether he has any relation or friend in Rome, or, if not, where I must write to. There is some tragedy of real life here."

Everard gradually forgot the card and the kind stranger who had given it. His ideas became confused, and at length he sank into a lethargic state that time seemed to stand still in the centre of a circle. When asked for his ticket, he muttered, "Where are we?" passed his hand over his forehead, and looked round without any apparent intelligence till the train stopped at the platform. Then he came to himself in an instant. Light was in his eye, vigour in his limbs. He sprang out, threaded his way through the crowd, and went in search of Ida.

Moments were precious, but fresh air was a necessity. He went on foot, passing out of sight before any other passengers had left the station. People turned as he met them, for his pace was hurried and unequal. At last he stopped and looked about. "It must be close by," he thought. "There it is opposite."

He crossed the road, and overheard the words :

"A beautiful English girl who was married this morning to an Italian."—

He followed the voice, without distinguishing the speaker or the person spoken to. He saw as through a mist, and heard the words without noticing whether it was a man or a woman who spoke.

"They say she married in consequence of some disappointment," said the speaker. "There are several stories about it. Some say she was engaged, and broke it off out of jealousy. At anyrate she was married this morning at the Embassy."

"At the Embassy?" said the other voice. "Why I thought that Roman Catholics could never be married in a Protestant church or chapel?"

"Yes, but they are not all so bigoted as that," said the first speaker. "They were married at the Embassy, and there is the carriage to take them away."

"They can't go far to-day. What makes them start so late."

"I don't know; but they say she hates the sight of him."

"A pleasant beginning. I wonder how he likes it by this time. What was her name?"

"Ida Dytechley."

Everard rushed across the courtyard, bounded up the staircase, and seeing a big, powerful man in a hat and feathers, planted before a door, asked for Lady Dytechley.

"*Non c'è*," was the short reply.

Everard walked straight to the door, and was about to open it, when he was seized unawares by both shoulders and forced violently back.

This was beyond endurance, and claimed none. A dangerous light came into his eyes, while every muscle rose and tightened. His natural strength became unnaturally greater, and self-control had no cause. He freed himself

with a violence that sent the man backwards against the wall ; then, before the latter could recover himself, he dragged him by the collar to the staircase, and holding him, as in a vice, over the edge of the landing, said :—

“ Will you tell me where she is ?—or must I send you down the stairs.”

“ *Là dentro*,” gasped the ill-fated *cacciatore*, who had been shaken like a rat in a terrier’s mouth before the question was asked.

The iron grasp relaxed so suddenly, that he fell forward, and just saved himself from tumbling downstairs by clinging to the banisters. Everard opened the outer door and was passing through an ante-room when Lady Dytchley’s courier, seeing an apparent stranger walk in unannounced, barred the passage. He flung him aside without stopping, and walked into the next room.

A smothered cry of agony burst from his lips as he entered, and then he stood quite still, as if turned into stone. Ida was there, dressed as a bride, and the Marquis Moncalvo was with her. No one spoke. The Marquis turned pale : his mouth became compressed : reckless defiance was in his eyes. Everard hardly noticed him, for his own were fixed on Ida’s, and hers on his. He read his fate more clearly there, than in the bridal dress that she wore, but most in her change of expression when he entered the room. Hard and hopeless till she looked up, it partially melted like an icicle before the sun, softened but not transformed. At last he spoke.

“ Ida, is it true ?” he said. “ Your dress tells me so, but I must hear it from yourself. When I have, I shall trouble you no more.”

“ It was that letter,” she said ; and there was an intensity of reproach in her voice, that revealed the hideous history of the last six weeks.

“ A letter—what letter ?” he said.

“ The letter you wrote to *him*.”

The Marquis felt that he must interrupt explanations at all hazards, or resign himself to irremediable disgrace.

“ I cannot allow any more of this,” he said, crossing the room in a threatening attitude, and pointing haughtily to the half-open door.

"Ida, are you married," said Everard, taking no notice whatever of the interruption.

The Marquis became desperate, lost his temper, and, making a sudden spring, tried to force him back through the doorway. Everard shook him off without violence, but his brow darkened."

"For the love of God keep away from me," he said.

The Marquis, enraged at being flung aside so easily in the presence of Ida, closed with him in what he fully intended to be a life and death struggle. Everard threw him heavily to the ground, pulled him up by the back of his collar, and holding him off at arm's length, said again :

"Ida, are you married?"

There was no answer in words, but her look of hopeless misery revealed more than words could have told. The effect was electric. In an instant the whole truth flashed through his mind and fired the whole strength of his being. At this critical moment the Marquis made so sudden and fierce an effort to free himself, that the button of his collar gave way, and twisting round, he seized his opponent by the throat with both hands. Everard's countenance changed ominously, but not in consequence of the attack. He saw the expression of terror, love and mute despair on Ida's face, and his fingers closed on the throat of the Marquis with a grip that made life and death hang in the balance of nature and grace. The Marquis became black in the face : his hands began to lose their hold. It was a moment of awful and insidious temptation. The man who, by the blackest treachery, had placed an impassible gulf between him and Ida, was in his grasp. One moment's loss of self-control, one impulse hardly exceeding that of self-defence, would have extinguished his power of evil and rescued Ida from the abyss into which a maddening course of deception had led her. Everard was defending himself against an attack aimed at his life by that man. The muscles in action throbbed with an excess of power that in itself was hard to repress, while justice, the deepest love, duty, even religion clearly sanctioned the anger of which accidents had determined the expression. For a moment the end shut out the means from his sight. He was aware of nothing but a blind and irresistible impulse to rescue Ida at any cost. Then a ray of light shot through the veil of passion and divided his will.

Nature and Grace were brought into collision, and nature possessed his whole being, Grace appealed only to his soul. The conflict was indeed short, as to time, but so tremendous in itself and in its alternative that the struggles of a life were compressed into the space of a few seconds. Grace and the habit of listening to it carried him through a temptation than which a greater cannot be conceived. The iron grip relaxed as by the touch of a spring, and, without trusting himself to look again at Ida, he rushed out of the room.

Hurrying through the ante-room where Lady Dytechley's courier fell back from a post of observation near the key-hole, he ran against the *cacciatore* on the landing. He took a sovereign from his pocket, put it into the man's hand, and said :—

"You did your duty well. I am sorry that I hurt you. I would not have done so if I could have helped it."

"I am sure of that, *Eccellenza*," said the good-natured fellow. "What strength! I never found any man who could do with me as you did. But what has happened? You are ill. Can I do anything?"

"You can," said Everard, who had become as pale as a dying man, and was obliged to support himself by the bannisters. "Of your charity help me to the Hotel * * *, and send for a priest. I had rather walk, unless I can find an open carriage, for I want air. I can scarcely breathe. Get me into the air."

The *cacciatore* helped him downstairs, and was about to send for a carriage, when the courier ran a short distance after them and called out :—

"The Marquis wants you directly."

The *cacciatore* objected in strong language and went on.

"*Avete capito?*" said the courier, descending a few steps and screaming at the top of his voice.

"You must go," said Everard. "I shall do very well now, I feel better, I only want some air. Thank you for your kindness."

He walked out, and after standing a while towards the wind, began to creep along in the direction of the hotel, moving slowly and stopping often. When he had gone rather more than half-way, a carriage passed at a quick pace. He looked up instinctively. Ida was in it, and the Marquis. He turned away and staggered onwards, finding his way

without knowing how. His sight became dim, his memory confused, and when he arrived at the Hotel, his breathing was so hard that he had to lean against the wall for some time before he could speak. At last he said :

"My servant will be here to-morrow with my luggage, if he can find me. Make out my bill now for a week, or more, if you like. If I die before you have done so, you will find money about me. Pay yourselves and give the rest to the poor. Show me to a bedroom, and have the charity to send for a priest."

The hotel-keeper, who had been drawn to the spot by curiosity mingled with caution, was satisfied, and only asked him, as usual, to give his name.

Everard put his hand to his head, and his eyes wandered, as if he were trying to remember. "How very strange !" he said. "What has happened ? And what makes the air so thick and unsteady ? It turns round, and there are spots of light in it that dance about and change places. Hubert knows—he can tell you, and Elfrida knows. I know nothing about him, but I have his card somewhere. He told me something about a doctor, I think ; but I am very well now, if I could breathe. I only want to get out of this darkness into the fresh air and light."

He tried to walk out, but turned the wrong way. "Where am I ?" he said in English—"I saw her just now, didn't I ? And then I was somewhere else—in the lane, and Ida was in the carriage instead of—who was it ? And—where is she ? And there he is himself. Yes, there he is, among the walnut trees, with the note in his hand. Give it to me, or—No ! It is too late. For the love of God, keep out of my way. I can't answer for myself. What is this mist before me ? How dark it is. I can't see anything at all."

"*Ha la febbre !*" said a waiter, taking his arm to help him upstairs. He followed slowly, stopping at every two or three steps to breathe, but had hardly reached the top when he fell heavily to the ground, and lay there without any sign of life.





CHAPTER XXV.



HUBERT, who had fallen in with Everard's servant and luggage at Folkestone, and brought them on with him, arrived in Rome about noon on the following day, and jumping into the first vacant carriage that he saw, drove to the hotel named in Lady Dytchley's letter. He saw a man standing at the entrance, and asked if she was at home.

The man, who was an English servant, called Lady Dytchley's courier, who came forth by degrees, thinking that he saw in Hubert some kind of likeness to the dangerous visitor who had come like a whirlwind and gone like a ghost. "My lady is ill," he said, "and cannot see anybody."

"Well, then, Miss Dytchley," said Hubert.

"They have left Rome," said the courier in a deprecating voice.

"They? you scoundrel, don't play the fool with me."

"Sir, I am telling the truth. What motive should I have? She was married yesterday to the Marquis Moncalvo."

"I must see Lady Dytchley," said Hubert, making a greater effort to control himself than he had ever attempted before.

"She cannot see any one. She gave strict orders that"——

"Thief and liar! show me upstairs, and tell her 'that I, Hubert Freville, am here, or it will be worse for you. I am not going to be played with.'"

The courier shrugged his shoulders and led the way upstairs.

In a few minutes Lady Dytchley appeared. Her self-confidence had melted away, for the first real trial had shown that she had nothing in herself to confide in. She looked frightened and perplexed, unwilling either to see or not to see him."

"Have you seen Everard?" said Hubert.

"It was so dreadful!" she answered. "He came too late. Oh! I shall never get over it all. You can't think"—

"He heard nothing from or of you for three weeks or more," said Hubert, "and then had a letter from Miss Dytchley telling him to go to Florence. He set off at once, without breakfast or luggage, or a greatcoat, and rode across country to catch the express at Lyneham. He must be in Rome now, if he is alive after all that."

"Florence? Why the letter from there was written long ago."

"So I see; but he only got it then. I came to Freville Chase four hours after he had gone. I rode to Netherwood and saw Sir Richard. He got your letter while I was there, and telegraphed to you, saying that the story about Everard was 'the greatest lie ever invented'—those were his words—that no letter had been received from you for several weeks, and that he was going to start for Rome."

"I never got that telegram," said Lady Dytchley, ringing the bell.

The courier came.

"I ought to have had a telegram from Netherwood four days ago," she said.

"Yes, Mylady," said he. "The Marquis Moncalvo took it to you."

"Oh yes—that will do," she said, turning pale,

Hubert muttered some strong words, and his countenance became as dark as night. The courier glided out of the room, imagining many things.

"I must go," said Hubert. "Sir Richard will be here in two or three days."

"And where is Elfrida? She has such good sense. Is she with him?"

"Yes. Does anyone know where Everard went?"

"No unfortunately I was not in the room, and he was gone before I heard that he had come. There was such a dreadful scene, and"—

"Good-bye," said Hubert, who had heard enough and too much.

"Won't you stay a moment?" she said. "I want to tell you how it all happened. There never was anything so dreadful."

But Hubert was already in the ante-room, trying to find out from or through the courier what had become of Everard. No one knew. The courier had a distinct recollection of making way for him without interior consent, and a chambermaid had heard him mention the name of his hotel to the *cacciatore*, but could not remember which.

"He seemed hardly able to walk," she added with some hesitation. "Something must have happened."

"What did happen?" said Hubert to the courier. "I *must* know—I *mean* to know—I *will* know?"

"Well, sir, he came and rushed past me through the ante-room like a hurricane, and presently I heard their voices inside. Then the Marquis flew at him and tried to choke him, but he was thrown down. Then the strange gentleman dragged him up, and held him off at arm's length, but the Marquis got free and tried to choke him again. I saw all that, for the door was half open. Then the strange gentleman seized the Marquis and held him so tightly that he was black in the face. I thought that he would have killed him then, he looked so stern—but he let him go suddenly, and passed through the ante-room like a ghost. It was all said and done in the twinkling of an eye. No one here knows where he went."

Hubert thanked him, and waited till Everard's servant arrived with the luggage. Then he went out with him, saying:—

"We must go to every hotel in the place, unless you know where he is likely to put up."

"He must be somewhere in Rome," said a waiter, "for he looked so very ill when he went from here. No one could travel alone in that state."

A stranger passing by had overheard these words. He looked at Hubert attentively, and said:

"You are inquiring for some one—a relation? Perhaps I may be able to help you."

"Do, for God's sake," said Hubert, "I am looking for Everard Freville, who came to Rome yesterday, called here, and went—I don't know where. I am afraid that he is very ill."

"The man I mean was singularly handsome and about five and twenty, with hair and complexion like an old Venetian picture—I mean that his face was fair and clear, his hair (beard and all) dark, tinged with gold. He had a remarkably intellectual head, an athletic frame, and he had ridden hard across country to catch an express train. Does that describe him?"

"Exactly!"——

"Well, I travelled with him yesterday from Florence, and I know where he is, for I recommended the hotel myself. If you will allow me, I will go with you. I was on my way there in fact."

"Thank you a thousand times. Who have I to thank?"

"Nobody. My name is Doctor Ranston; but I have done nothing more than the commonest good feeling would suggest."

"Most people would have declined the suggestion though," said Hubert. "Let us be off."

"He made a remarkable impression on me," answered the doctor as they drove away. "That was why I was able to describe what he was like. First of all, I saw that he was rather seriously ill and in danger of being much worse. That made me observe him more accurately, and I couldn't help feeling an extraordinary interest in him. I told him that he must have medical advice without delay, and told him who to send for; but I felt so anxious about him that I determined to call as soon as I could, and see how he was going on. It is fortunate I met you, or I should not have known who to ask for."

"What is the matter with him?" said Hubert.

"I couldn't examine him there," said Doctor Ranston, "and he went off from the station in such a hurry that I had no chance of doing anything for him; but I am afraid he had inflammation of the lungs."

"Then his going off like that must have been very bad for him?"

"It was. I hope he went straight to the hotel and to bed."

Hubert leant out of the window and said, "Drive as fast as you can and I will pay you twenty lire—forty, if you like."

The coachman liked the idea of the latter sum so much that he did his best to win it, regardless of foot-passengers and police. When he pulled up at the hotel, people stopped and looked in. Hubert jumped out and ran through the midst of them. The doctor followed, and presently heard him say:—

"I don't care. I know he is here. He came without luggage, and very likely forgot to give his name. Show me to where there is a man with no name and no luggage."

The waiter hesitated and began to shuffle with his feet.

"I see how it is," said the doctor. "He was ill, and you were afraid that he had some infectious disorder. Where did you send him?"

"Really sir," said the waiter, "I know nothing about it."

"Look here!" said Hubert. "Tell me where he is, whether you know or not. I am not going to be trifled with."

"Wait a moment," said Doctor Ranston. "Let me see the padrone."

The padrone was called, and the doctor said to him, "I recommended a gentleman to come here, yesterday: his luggage has just arrived. He was ill and probably you thought that he had some infectious disorder; but he had not. I want to know where you recommended him to go. You know my name—Doctor Ranston."

"Oh yes—certainly, sir," said the padrone, "If we had only known—but the gentleman did not mention you—in fact he could not. He is at No.—Via—. He had a terrible fever and was delirious. He could not even tell me his name when I asked him. If I had allowed him to remain in the hotel, all my customers would have gone away; so I sent for a carriage and had him taken to a house where he would meet with every care. In fact he could not be in a better"—

"Yes, yes—that will do," said Hubert, turning on his heel and repeating the address aloud.

"This is a bad business, I fear," thought Dr. Ranston, following him in haste.

They went to the place and were met by a fat man in spectacles, who looked confused when Everard's appearance was described.

"Come now. I know he is here:" said Hubert. "Show me where he is."

"He was sent here from the hotel"——, interrupted the doctor. "We have just come from there, and the padrone told me that he had sent him on to you."

At these words the fat man looked still more uncomfortable, began to make defensive apologies, and led the way upstairs, explaining as he went. Divested of ornament, the truth was that he had received Everard as coming from the hotel, but finding him without luggage or ascertainable name, had expended the smallest possible amount of money's worth on him. His excuses increased with the height of the stairs.

"Where have you been and put him, you rascal?" said John the servant, who had followed them. "If we was at Freville Chase, I'd take and put you in the fish pond. Hadn't you the sense to see who you'd got, you vagabond!"

The philippic was not quite intelligible, being delivered in British vernacular; but its general purport was clear.

"I had so much to do," said the fat man to Hubert, "that I could not attend to him myself; and they have made some mistake."

"Did you send for a doctor?" said Hubert.

"I hope they did; but my time was so occupied"——

"Get on, can't you?" said the servant in English, giving him a strong shove in illustration.

The fat man protested against the symbolical act, and tried to neutralise its importance by an equally strong imprecation; but he took the hint, and proceeding as fast as he could, brought them at last to a door, which he opened with as much dignity as the occasion would allow.

Hubert pushed by him into the room, and exclaimed in a smothered tone of anguish, "Good God! he is dying. Doctor, can you save him?—Is he alive?"

Everard was lying on the bed in his muddy clothes. His face was the colour of death, his eyes were closed, and his breathing was not perceptible.

"He is alive," said Dr. Ranston, after examining him carefully. "There is a slight warmth about the heart."

"But his hands and forehead are as cold as stone," said Hubert aloud, "and I can't find any pulse. What has become of the fever and the inflammation of the lungs?"

"That will come back, if we can restore consciousness."

"And what is it that is wrong in him now?"

"The heart. He must be put into a warm bath at once, and we must move him into a better room. It is bitterly cold here."

"Be quick," said Hubert, turning to the fat man, who was waiting outside. "Get a better room ready—a whole suite, several rooms."

"And mind the bed is aired," said the servant in English. "Haven't you no maids about, to get things ready? Be off. Don't you hear Mr. Freville?"

"If he dies here," said Dr. Ranston, "it will be through your culpable neglect, and I shall take care to let it be known."

The threat proved to be needlèss, for the appearance of the servant and the luggage had undone the original impression, and orders had been given in accordance with the change; but it stimulated the fat man's activity and made him give additional orders with dramatic emphasis.

"Never mind all that!" said Hubert. "Get a hot bath as quickly as possible!"

"In his room," added Dr. Ranston. "We must get him down there at once."

Hubert and the servant lifted Everard up and carried him downstairs. There was no life in his limbs, no apparent pulsation. The doctor tore a leaf from his pocket-book, wrote on it, and said to Hubert; "Some one must take this to a chemist's and bring the things back. Stay, *you* had better go, or there may be some mistake. Make them be quick about it."

Hubert did so, and returned quickly.

After a long while Everard showed some signs of partial consciousness. His eyes opened, and he appeared to see, but without recognising anyone. His breathing became audible and laboured.

"I will send for my luggage and put up here," said Dr. Ranston, "for I can't leave him; but I must get some medical man to be with him at night. He must not be left for a moment without a medical eye on him, and I must get two sisters of charity. But I can't leave here. I had better write a note and send it by the servant."

When the note had been written and sent, Dr. Ranston

examined him again very carefully and remained silent for a long time, watching him with fixed attention. At last he said to himself half aloud, "there must have been some great shock to have produced this."

"There has," muttered Hubert between his compressed lips. "Where is a pen and ink? I must send a telegram—two telegrams."

They brought writing materials, and he sent these two messages :—

"Too late. Marriage taken place. E. dangerously ill. A few hours will show how it turns. Do not hurry."

This was for Sir Richard, in Paris. To Father Merivale he telegraphed :

"I was too late. Everything gone wrong. E. very dangerously ill. Will write particulars by this post."

Two sisters of charity arrived in the course of an hour, and the doctor came soon after ten o'clock. He remained there till the morning, when Dr. Ranston relieved him till the next night. Hubert never left the room, but watched beside Everard day and night. On the fourth day Dr. Ranston said with evident emotion, "I see he is a Catholic by his scapular. You had better send for a priest. The inflammation of the lungs has been very much got under, but exhaustion has come on, and the pulses are giving way. He will probably be sensible for a while before"—

Hubert started up, rang the bell, and looked at him without speaking. Dr. Ranston understood his meaning, and said, "I am grieved more than I can express to be obliged to tell you that I can give no hope."

"How long—do you think?"

"I can't tell; but you had better send for the priest."

Just then Everard's eyes began to show signs of recognition, and he uttered an inarticulate sound faintly. Dr. Ranston raised his head, and gave him some brandy in a teaspoon several times. "Thank you," he said at last. "I must ask you to do one thing more, and that is to send for a priest."

"We have," said Dr. Ranston.

"How wonderfully kind of you to take all this trouble for a stranger, when you are, as I heard you say, travelling for

recreation, after hard work. And Hubert, too. How long have you been here?"

"Four days."

"And I?"

"Five."

"Then you must have come on purpose, and travelled without stopping."

"Of course I did."

Everard pointed feebly, and with effort, to a jewelled crucifix that hung by a gold chain round his neck, and said:—

"Keep this—it was my father's—and wear it for my sake. You will continue to do so for the sake of what is in it. There is a piece of the true cross inside. The recollection of that brought me to myself when my fingers were on his throat—you know who I mean—and I had nearly lost all self-control. Wear it for my sake. You will have the faith soon, I know—I am sure you will, and then you will value it for its own. Please, take it from me—I am not able myself."

"Don't ask me to do that," said Hubert, in a tone of smothered anguish. "I can't take it off you—I really can't."

"I entreat you," answered Everard. "It is one of my last requests."

Hubert obeyed in silence, and held it reverently in his hand.

"Put it on," said Everard. "But no. Put it into my hand, and keep it there till I am dead, and then wear it. Now, there are four things I want to say. Telegraph to Father Merivale that I am dying. Have me taken to Freville Chase. Ask Father Merivale all that you were going to ask me, and put yourself under his direction about it. See Ida, and tell her from me—but mind that you control yourself if you happen to see *him*—tell her from me that—that I—understand it all, that I don't blame her—mind you express that well, for I am too weak to say all I mean. Implore her not to neglect the faith she was baptized in. Tell her it was my last request. Do that for me as soon as you can. But you must express yourself carefully as regards me, remembering that I have no right now, except as a soul speaking to another soul—you under-

stand me. Use your discretion whether to mention me or not, or how; but say what I have said in the best way you can. One thing more about—her—a thing hard to utter even now, when life is passing away. Remember that she is now—I mean all is changed—it was not her fault—but she has other—why can't I say it?—other duties that "—"

The struggle was too great for him. His words became inarticulate, and his eyes lost their light. A spoonful of brandy was applied to his lips, but he seemed unable to swallow.

"If I were to raise him a little," said Hubert.

"No," said Dr. Ranston. "You must not move him at all. It would probably be fatal. If there were nothing wrong but the lungs, I could have pulled him through. It is the heart. Nothing can be done."

Soon afterwards the priest came in. Everard was alive; but his eyes were closed, and experience only could show that he still lived. The priest looked at him attentively and then at Hubert.

"I am just in time to anoint him," he said.

"He was insensible when I found him here," said Hubert, "and has been so, more or less, till a short time ago, when he became conscious and asked for a priest; but I had already sent for you. He spoke a little, and then became worse than before. He is the best man I have ever known, and his death will be to me a loss that no one but myself can realise. Is there no hope? They say priests know more about these things than doctors. Can you give me any hope—ever so little?"

"I grieve to say that I cannot," answered the priest. "I fear that no human power could save him."

Hubert said no more, but he wrote out the telegram for Father Merivale, and sent it off.

"Do you wish me to leave the room?" said Dr. Ranston.

"If you wish to do so—not otherwise," answered the priest.

"Then I will stay," said the doctor emphatically; and he did so. He watched every action of the priest, following the words as well as he could, and sometimes leaning over towards the book. The priest, after having given the last blessing, went away, saying as he left the room, "Send for me if he recovers consciousness."

Hubert thanked him by a pressure of the hand, but could not speak. Dr. Ranston neither spoke nor heard : he was absorbed in the recollection of what he had witnessed. The shutting of the door recalled him to himself, and he said in a dreamy way :—

“How beautiful it was, all of it—words, action, symbolism—and that wonderful expression of countenance, that out-look of the soul, though the eyes were closed ! All is thought of in that short service. There is a whole treatise contained in those words, *Quidquid per visum deliquisti* ; and those others, *Quidquid per gressum deliquisti*, go still deeper. How much depends on the occasions of good and evil that we literally walk into, either by our own consent or by not avoiding them ! But what is it that has given me such a strong indefinable impression, one that cannot be fully accounted for by what I have seen and heard ?”

“I don’t know,” said Hubert. “I can only think of what I am losing—no one knows what it is. Pray for me, if you know how. I can’t bear it. And you—good sisters of charity, pray for me. I am not able to pray.”

His face was partly turned away from them, but he felt the light of their pure eyes on him and looked round.

“We will,” answered one of the two, “now and at the Holy Mass. I know what true mourning is, for I knelt by the deathbed of my dear mother not many days ago : but we have the same consolation, the only one—I mean the consolation of witnessing a saintly death. Look at his countenance. That expression is not to be mistaken.”

“I know it,” said Hubert, “and I know that he is all he looks. It is almost selfish in me to wish that he should live, knowing all that I know. He has borne trials too great for endurance, and they have killed him. But his death will be such a loss to so many people, that its consequences can hardly be measured. As regards, myself, they certainly cannot. No man can ever be to me what he has been ; and I am losing him just when he was shaping my life for all time. I never realised before what death is—what it can do. The deprivation is appalling. He had nearly brought me into the Catholic Church, and I longed for it, hoped for it, looked forward to it, saw my way towards it. And now all is confusion, doubt, and darkness. The light came through him and leaves with him.”

"No—it will not leave with him," said the sister of charity. "He will help you still. Be sure of that. He will help you more than ever. The prayers of the holy dead are stronger than the arguments they used when living. Follow his direction, imitate his example, and you will find the only true peace. Pray for guidance. Ask Almighty God to give you the true light, and He will give it."

"Will He? My prayers are so weak and unformed. Tell me how to pray."

"Never mind how. Praying means raising the soul to God. He will know your intention, however imperfectly you may express it. There is no need of words. Only make an intention to follow the light that He will give you."

"I will, when I can; but now I can only pray that his life may be spared. I have no power to fix my mind on anything else."

"It is very natural that you cannot do more at present. Pray then for that, and do not trouble yourself about words. Fix your mind on God, and commit your burden to Him."

Hubert knelt down by the bedside and prayed with all his might. The doctor stood by, watching Everard intently and feeling his pulse from time to time. Nearly an hour passed without any perceptible measure of advance, for there were no words to mark it, no changes of thought, no intervals. Each moment, as it came into being was filled by the expansion of an inaudible monotone, the outpouring of an intense desire that Everard's life might be spared. Hubert was aroused at length by a half-repressed utterance from the doctor, and sprang to his feet, mutely questioning the cause, which was not apparent but implicitly alarming. The doctor made no sign: his attention was riveted on Everard. Hubert tried to extract an answer from the expression of his face, and failing to do so, laid a feverish hand on his shoulder. Dr. Ranston looked round and said:—

"He will live. Thank God!—for a time. His pulse is returning."

"Then why shouldn't he recover, with great care?"

"He may; but I am afraid he will not—I mean permanently. You had better go to bed now, and take some rest. He will probably sleep a long while, perhaps four and twenty hours. You shall be told when he wakes. Don't be afraid of leaving him. There is no immediate danger now."

You haven't been in bed for nearly ten days, and you will break down if you go on much longer."

Hubert went to his room, fell asleep as soon as his head had touched the pillow, and slept for several hours. On his return he found Everard apparently in the same state as before.

"He has been sleeping all the time," said Dr. Ranston; "and the longer he sleeps the better. There is a decided improvement in the pulse."

"Then why can't he recover quite? Is it impossible?"

"Well—he has so far recovered, contrary to my expectation; and it is just possible, if he could be free from worry and painful emotion of every kind, that with very great care his magnificent constitution might keep him going for a long time. But I should be only deceiving you if I were to give any hope of his recovering permanently."

"What do you expect?" said Hubert, with forced calmness.

"It depends on circumstances that I don't know. If he were not troubled in any way, the soundness of his constitution might, as I have said, do wonders. It would perhaps be just possible for him, in that case, to be kept alive, with very great care, for several years. You know how far this can be, and I don't. But any shock, any over-exertion, any worry, even strong emotion, would bring on severe fainting fits—you have seen what they are—and the end would be paralysis of the heart. I am grieved beyond measure to be obliged to tell you this; but it would be wrong and cruel of me to raise false hopes."

"It would—you are right," said Hubert in a hoarse voice; and then he was silent, remaining in the same position, with his eyes fixed, as if stunned by the blow that Dr. Ranston's last words had given him. After a while, he said: "Could you have saved his life, if we had found him sooner?"

"No," said the doctor. "The mischief had been done. I know nothing of his history, and I have no right to know; but it is evident to me that some tremendous act of self-repression, at a time when the system was already weakened by suffering and exposure, has done this."

"It has!" muttered Herbert between his teeth. "But how could you know that?"

"I can read it in his face. A doctor is often liable to make grave mistakes if he considers nothing but the bodies of his patients. I studied him all the way from Florence, and read his character then, as in a book. I see it now, more clearly than before, in the cost of some great victory over himself. Some great struggle has, as it were, marked out two distinct parts of his harmonious completeness—feeling and will. The shock that separated the two, for a time, has left its traces, and you can measure the force of each by the result. It has been a battle of giants. What enormous strength of feeling there is expressed in the curves of the mouth—you can neither describe nor mistake them—and in the depths of the eyes, even now, though they are only half open. And look at the straight lines of the brows, that throw, as it were, the shadow of a great calm across the light where the final struggle fixed them."

"Yes, you speak as if you had known him and his character as well as I do."

"Simply because I have studied human nature. But I want to caution you about being careful when he wakes—he will soon, for his eyes are half open now, as you see. His long sleep of nearly four and twenty hours will have been the best thing possible for him; but don't talk to him, and don't let him talk."

"I won't; but the priest told me to send as soon as he was awake. What am I to do about it?"

"Don't send at present. He is not in immediate danger now, and yet any exertion or excitement might throw him back dangerously. He is waking up now. I will explain to him what I want."

Everard looked round wearily as if exhaustion had deadened his sense of being awake.

"Why does he seem weaker than before?" said Hubert in a hurried whisper.

"He was sure to feel exhausted," said Dr. Ranston; but never mind that. I will give him some strong soup and champagne—I got it ready for him, to have as soon as he should wake. Keep him quiet, and he will recover to a certain extent for a time. Would to God that I could say more!"

"Have you sent for a priest," said Everard, after making several efforts to speak.

"He has been here, and done everything," said Dr. Ranston. "He will come again as soon as you are sufficiently restored. You may trust me to send for him instantly, if you should be in danger; but you are not in danger now. You must take some nourishment, and then I want you to keep perfectly quiet for a while. Don't talk, and don't think, if you can help it. Try to keep your mind as empty as possible, and your body nourished and quiescent. Don't answer—I see you will do as I wish. Here is what I want you to take. It will strengthen you and help you to sleep again, which is just what I want."

Everard took what was offered, remained in a passive state for a while, and then fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXVI.



TIME showed before many days that Dr. Ranston's judgment had been so far correct. Everard remained in a state of dull quiescence for about eight and forty hours and, at the end of that time, began to revive very slowly. Sir Richard was still in Paris, and Lady Dytechley on her way to join him there. Both had sufficient reasons for not wishing to be in Rome, especially the latter. He, on the receipt of Hubert's telegram, had used very strong language at first, and then shrunk by degrees from the sight of what he might have made impossible. She, finding herself pursued in every direction by the consequences of her own work, had left Rome, where Hubert's presence was a complicated embarrassment, and gone to join Sir Richard. She travelled by short stages, resting much and suffering much disturbance within. After being nearly a month on the road, she reached Paris at the end of the first week in January, dejected, perplexed and silent, with a great weight of luggage and a still greater weight of apprehension.

All were silent when the three met. Sir Richard was too much convinced of his own share in the tragedy to say anything about hers, and Elfrida felt her mother's position so deeply, in reference to it, that she tried to escape notice. After a few general inquiries they separated by tacit consent till dinner time, after which Lady Dytechley went to bed and Sir Richard went out. They had not left the room many minutes when the door was opened and Hubert walked in. Elfrida's face brightened for a moment, and then the rising colour faded away as quickly as it came.

"I am on my way to Beynham," he said. "My Uncle has been wanting me some time, but I couldn't leave Everard till Dr. Ranston told me that he was out of danger. I have travelled without stopping. Here is a note for you from him. It was written ten days ago. I am afraid you will find it as difficult to read as he did to write. The exertion of writing brought on a long fainting fit."

"Does he have them now?" said Elfrida, clutching the note and beginning to read.

"No. He is better. He has had many dangerous relapses, but he is now comparatively safe for the present. More than once Dr. Ranston despaired of his life, but"—

"For one minute," interrupted Elfrida, gliding away towards the door.

Her voice was repressed, rather than unsteady, and she turned her face from him, apparently by accident. She went to her room and began to read the letter again. The contents were as follows:—

"My dear Elfrida—

"If the words of a man who is slowly dying have some weight, as I think they will, you may believe what I wish to say but have not the strength to write, about yourself and all that you have so nobly done concerning yourself and others. Hubert has behaved like himself. I cannot say more, for my pen will do very little; but you will understand what that means. Keep him a day or two in Paris, for he must be worn out. If I live to see you again I will tell you what he has done for me; but I have great difficulty in writing, and I have some things to say. He is very near the faith—very near—and only wants a little instruction to show him that the truth corresponds with his own aspirations. I entreat you to

keep him in sight—you will have every influence. I would say more, but perhaps it would not be prudent without knowing more. One more request I have to make. It is about——. You must fill up the name for I cannot trust myself to write it. Do not, I implore you, lose sight of her. Say nothing about me, if you can help it; but if my death will do anything towards bringing her into the Church, tell her whatever you may think right about me—I have full confidence in your judgment. I would say much about the very remarkable kindness of Doctor Ranston, who, though a stranger to me, has devoted his hardly-earned holiday to me; but I cannot direct my pen further. I shall go home as soon as possible, if it is the will of God. If so”——

The rest of the sentence was quite illegible, but below it were these words, written ten days later, in a comparatively—firm hand :

“Hubert is just starting homewards. I am much better. Doctor Ranston tells me that I shall partly recover for a time. If I continue to mend, I shall soon begin to go home-wards gradually. I hope that you will be at Netherwood by that time.”

*“Yours very affectionately,
“Everard Freville.”*

Elfrida read it with difficulty, for it was hard to decipher, and her eyes were filled with burning tears that would not flow.

“I dare not trust myself to read it again now,” she thought, “nor even to look at it, for I cannot do so without remembering too vividly how it all came to pass. I feel as if I might have done something; and yet what could I have done? I would have given my life to save his, and I have done nothing for him, though I owe him everything. God has willed that I should not, perhaps to show me how little I am worth.”

She put it in the most secret corner of a dressing box, but could not put away the words it contained.

“I must go back,” she said aloud, and then a passage in the letter impressed itself, on her mind with fresh distinctness. It was this :—

“You will have every influence. I would say more, but perhaps it would not be prudent without knowing more.”

When she re-entered the room her manner was outwardly the same as it had ever been ; but there was an inner reserve that Hubert felt without knowing why, and misunderstood to his own disadvantage because he was ignorant of what the letter contained.

"But does the doctor give no hope," she said.

"Only for a time," answered Hubert. "He told me so again just before I left."

"He must have been chilled to death by that dreadful journey."

"No. He had violent inflammation of the lungs, but he could have got over that. Dr. Ranston told me that he must have had some terrible shock. I know well what it was. He saw her in her bridal dress. He controuled himself when, after being murderously attacked, his fingers were tightening round the throat of the man who had betrayed him and her. He let that man go. He tore himself away from her. That was what he did—an act that has no name, because it includes all that is great and good and beautiful, an act of such high heroism that I cannot realise it in imagination. When I arrived, the next day, I found him unconscious and apparently dead. He remained five days in that state, more or less, and relapsed several times afterwards. He is recovering now, partially, but the organ of life is injured, as those prolonged fainting-fits prove but too plainly. Dr. Ranston says that the end is likely to be paralysis of the heart. It may be warded off, he says, by excessive care in those about him, if we are able to keep away all excitement or emotion. But how can we do that? I must hope and pray—hope, as it were, against hope—for I am unable to face the alternative. But yet I cannot see what is to be done. If the cause were limited to the past, he might, possibly"—

"He will, if God wills it so," said Elfrida. "She was not worthy of him—I must say it, though she is my sister."

"You know what she is better than I do," said Hubert ; but I cannot believe that he would have loved her so intensely, if she were not by nature worthy of his love. There has been some frightful treachery ; and though I can only guess"—

"I don't care what treachery there was," interrupted Elfrida. "Nothing can excuse her."

"Not altogether, perhaps; but there is more than you have any idea of. That scoundrel must have got hold of his and her letters—I don't know how, but it wouldn't be very difficult to a man who has no scruples in the way. He suppressed Sir Richard's telegram, which would have stopped the marriage. He took it from the courier, and he never gave it to Lady Dytechley. Now as he was capable of doing that once, he was capable of doing it more than once; and, in fact, there is no other way of accounting for several things. How was it that there were no letters from her for so many weeks, and none from Lady Dytechley for nearly as long? And how came it that Everard was sent for by letter to Florence, and when he went there, found them gone? It all fits in too well to be accidental. The person who told or implied the lie about Everard and suppressed her letters from Florence—perhaps from Rome, suppressed Everard's letters, that would have disproved the lie, and suppressed the telegram that would have stopped the marriage. I know who suppressed the telegram, and knowing that, I know who did the rest—the only person who had at once an interest in doing it, and the cunning, and the knowledge and the opportunity. His manipulation of the letter that called Everard to Rome by Florence will give you some idea of his malice. He didn't destroy it, but kept it back just long enough to make him arrive too late and hear that the marriage had taken place five hours before. When one considers the nature of the design, the manner of accomplishing it, remembering that the victim is Everard, language fails, and anger burns on steadily to a white heat."

It evidently did so in him. The unnatural calmness of his manner, the intensity of his voice, the simple statement of facts, without excess of words, almost without an epithet, were in such powerful contrast with his countenance, that Elfrida became apprehensive of evil consequences. Her face had been turned away from him; but the tone of his voice made her look up at last, and the compression of his lips, the fixity of every feature, the veiled light that, as it were, streamed through his eyelashes while his eyes were lowered to conceal it, only confirmed what she had felt without seeing.

"It can hardly be possible," she said, "for anyone to feel more angry than I feel. I could hate him horribly, do

almost anything against him, if I were to give myself the least encouragement. But retribution is not for us. God repays where and when it is due. Remember how Everard controuled himself, and under what circumstances. If he could do that"—

"I do remember it," said Hubert, "and wonder at it, look up at it from below, realise it as his, understand it because I know him and know the blinding nature of the provocation and the deceptive shortness of the time at his disposal."

"You will stay in Paris a day or two, won't you?" said Elfrida. "Everard wishes it. He says in his letter that you have been sitting up with him so much, and ought to rest."

"I really don't. I *must* go on. It won't do me any harm, and won't signify if it does. There is a train soon—I must go and find out when it is. They can tell me below." She made no answer, and he, drawing a wrong inference again, went away, disheartened in himself, dissatisfied with himself, taking her last words and her silence as proofs that she had only an indirect interest in him, and feeling ashamed of the thought because it might seem to imply an impossible jealousy of Everard, hateful even to resent.

"There is something bad in me," he thought; "or such an idea would never have come into my head. She feels it—*must* feel it, with such a model as Everard to measure me by."

In this state of mind he went to look at the train bill, and found that the tidal train would not start till the next morning.

"But I can't wait for that," he thought. "I must get away from here, whatever happens. There is an end of everything—everything. Perhaps if that incarnate fiend—who has lost his right to a name because he would disgrace any name—if he had not caused that sublime effort which has raised Everard so high above us all, my own efforts to follow his lead at a distance would have made a man of me, in the higher sense, and offered her something less unworthy to accept. He has been the ruin of Everard's happiness: it is fitting that he should be the ruin of mine. He has blighted all that he has come near, and the blight goes on. His existence, as her husband, is death to Everard, shortening his life by degrees; and he lives to complete the diabolical sacrifice. I believe that Everard would live yet—

I am certain of it—if that brute were not cumbering the earth. In former days there would have been a way out of this—and men were certainly not worse than they are now. He lives but to destroy in every way. How can I make Everard's faith my own, while his betrothed wife is losing hers through his unmerited misfortunes? How can I realise his hope while she who was his life's hope is without it? How can I try to imitate his charity while evil prevails over him, triumphs over him, possesses her in spite of him? All is darkness and disorder and injustice; and it all centres in that beast, grew out of his infernal presence amongst us. Am I to bear this, that I may help to consummate the work?"

He went out and standing under the arcade that fronts the Rue de Rivoli, lighted a cigarette, puffing at it till the sparks flew about. He had scarcely done so when he heard a voice that made his blood boil and his face become livid. There were two men standing in the shadow a little way off, or walking slowly on, and one of them was the speaker. The words could not be distinguished, but the voice was the voice of the Marquis Moncalvo. Hubert threw away his cigarette and moved on.

"When am I to have the honour of being presented to your beautiful wife?" said the other man in French.

The Marquis evidently found the question embarrassing and altogether unpleasant. He looked aside, as if he had not heard it, and then, seeming to wake up from a fit of absence, answered rather abruptly, "She is not in Paris."

"You have left her so soon?"

"I was obliged. I shall go back to-morrow."

"Will she come to Paris this winter?"

"Perhaps."

People walked and talked on every side, but to Hubert those two voices were the only sound, and he followed it, listening for the worst that he might hear.

"I shall go this evening, instead of to-morrow," said the Marquis, with no intention of doing so. "I—I promised that I would return as soon as possible."

He had better not have said that, for his persistent friend found encouragement in it, and after an emphatic *Je le crois bien*, went on to say, "How fortunate you are to have won such a prize."

The Marquis who had found by experience that its value to him accorded with Ida's limited promise, rather than with his own ill-founded hopes, disliked the remark, and feeling the failure of his success, took refuge in bitter hatred of Everard. He lighted a cigar, as an excuse for not answering and walked on.

"I heard that he came to claim her," said his friend, "and that you carried her off in spite of him, like a hero of romance."

The Marquis, remembering the circumstances, winced at the compliment, and resenting the truth, gloated over its perversion. He said nothing, but an evil smile of seeming triumph mingled with unsatisfied hate distorted his handsome features and betrayed a portion of the truth. His friend perceived as much as lay on the surface, and, being a man of low morality, admired what he saw.

"Ah!" he said. "I see that you are not satisfied with having won her affections from him."

The Marquis muttered an awful imprecation between his teeth. His face turned white, shaded with leaden blue.

"Come!" said his companion jauntily. "It might satisfy you to have had such a success—and such a complete success, too. For if he came to claim her"—

"No, I am not satisfied," interrupted the Marquis, casting prudence to the winds in the recklessness of his passion. "I am not satisfied, cannot be satisfied, will not be satisfied, while he lives. I tell you that I would sacrifice anything, everything, to measure swords with Everard Freville—give my life to take his."

Hubert, who was close behind, stood still for a moment, verifying the sense of the words, and then, walking quickly past, planted himself in the way.

"You have said enough," he said, in a voice that no one could have recognised as his. "You say that you wish to measure swords with Everard Freville, knowing well that he who held you in a death-grip and spared your life, while the widowed bride mutely accused you before God and man, would not, even were he now able to do it, stain his pure soul by an act which his religion forbids. I am here, and I mean to take you at your word, in his place, on my own account. I am not going to tell you what you are. You know yourself and your actions as well as I do, and your motives better than I should be able to imagine. But you

have murdered my best—my only friend, blighted the heart and soul of his betrothed wife, robbed society of its noblest ornament, bereaved his old and honoured inheritance of its heir, robbed the poor of a protector and a model; and if that is not enough, you may finish the work by killing me, if you can. You will then have cut off the name and race of the man you delight in hating—the last heir of the name and race. Do it, if you can; but take care of yourself, for I don't mean to spare you. Choose your weapons. You have the right of choice, I believe; and you seem to like swords, which will give you a great advantage over me. But, either with swords, pistols, or any other weapon that may suit your convenience, we must meet at daybreak to-morrow morning in the Bois de Boulogne, and there decide whether you are to finish your work or I am to rid the world of you."

The Marquis appeared to hesitate, and then assuming a haughty manner, said :—

"I have no cause of quarrel with you, and I decline your interference."

"Do you? Then I must compel you to accept it."

"I tell you that I will not. Men of my age don't fight with boys. I admire your courage, but I am not going to deprive Lord de Freville of his heir. Send or bring some other substitute, and I shall be happy to meet him; but I will not accept a challenge from you. I have told you why."

He stepped on one side, raising his hat slightly, and began to walk on.

Hubert suddenly placed himself in front, and said :—

"It comes to this: Either you will accept it, or I shall be under the necessity of taking you by the collar and kicking you in front of the hotel, for the edification of Lady Dytchley."

The Marquis's face changed from pale to ghastly white, and his lips quivered.

"You have left me no alternative," he said. "The destiny that I have made pursues me to the end. Be it as you will. My friend shall call for you before daybreak, unless you can find some one else. Allow me to introduce him. There is no need of explanation, for he understands English and has heard what you have been pleased to say."

Hubert bowed, and taking off his hat to both, walked slowly back into the hotel.



CHAPTER XXVII.



UBERT went to his room, and lying down on the bed in his clothes, tried to sleep. Owing to sheer fatigue and want of rest, he fell into a heavy dose and remained so two or three hours. At last he was aroused by the sound of footsteps passing his door.

He bounded off the bed and looked at his watch, thinking that the Marquis's friend had come. The watch pointed to half-past one, and the sound of footsteps died away in the distance; but another kind of reaction had now set in. The false lustre that emotional reasoning had conjured up faded away in the darkness of the small hours, disclosing the character of the act, showing its deformity by contrast and unveiling the fallacy of the intention. He saw direct murder and indirect suicide vividly pictured before him as the alternatives of the unlawful combat. He saw Everard wrestling with death to utter an almost prophetic warning, and heard his voice, as in a distant echo, saying faintly, "Mind that you control yourself if you happen to meet *him*." And then he saw Elfrida, not as he had seen her a few hours before, when he mistook the cause of her reserve, and went his way despairing of all things, but as he had seen her at Netherwood the last time they met there, as he had seen her in day-dreams till that evening, as he had found her then in reality when he looked without seeing and observed without understanding.

"All is lost," he thought, "lost, whatever happens; and

yet I am unable to make out how I could have acted differently. How could I—seeing what I saw, hearing what I heard, feeling what I felt, and forgetting the rest? How? As Everard did, under a temptation incomparably greater, more persuasive, more sudden, pleaded for by the presence of his betrothed wife, whose wrongs cried to Heaven for vengeance and whose fate was in his hands after his life had been attempted by the man who had betrayed them both. Yet he controuled himself. And what did I do? I sought the quarrel, would have it, though I had just left the presence of”——

He could not pronounce her name even in thought. It met him with the question, “What right have you to think of her by that name?” and he answered, “I have no right, no hope.” Then he thought of their last meeting; and at once the whole scene was present, but not as then. A veil had been torn away. Intuition was free again. He saw and understood, but could hardly be said to think; for the truth rushed in like a flood, overwhelming him with its mass of evidence, yet appealing to his heart so convincingly that his mind was for a while inactive while his lips repeated involuntarily what he felt.

“She was the same,” he said, “as when I last saw her at Netherwood, when I had reason to be sure of her. Her reserve this evening proved that I was right. I mistook it like a madman, despaired of everything, did what I have done, and made myself responsible for what I cannot avoid doing in a few hours.”

At length he began to think, and the truth seemed worse than when he only received its impression. He had been told by the doctor that Everard must be kept free from all excitement, yet Everard would soon hear that he had either sent a guilty soul to judgment or died with the guilt of murder on his own. He was more than ever convinced that there can be but one true Church, and that only one has the marks of being so, yet he was choosing the imminent risk of being cut off from it for ever. He loved Elfrida with an intensity that strong natures alone can feel or understand, yet he was rejecting her influence, and going from under the very same roof to grieve her as deeply as possible, going forth from where he stood within a few yards of her, going forth against his conscience, his heart and his natural will,

to break the law of God, to reject His mercy, to claim His justice. The prospect was appalling, for the heroic had vanished, and nothing remained in his sight but sin, ruin and despair.

"Oh my God!" he exclaimed in the bitterness of his soul, "save me from the sinful consequences that I entailed on myself ignorantly and know not how to avoid. I can see no way out of them: but to Omnipotence nothing is impossible. Virgin Mother of the Man-God, who died to save sinners, help me, if you can. Your prayers must have more weight with Him than those of any other created being. Help me out of this blind fate that makes me doubt all things. Help me out of the sin from which I cannot extricate myself. Help me to the True Faith, whatever it may be, whatever it may cost."

After this he wrote a letter to his uncle, giving a simple statement of the whole affair, so far as it had proceeded, asking his pardon for the loss it might entail on him, and quoting his own prayer to show exactly what he felt.

Then he began a letter to Everard and wrote till past six o'clock, tearing up sheet after sheet and rewriting the whole several times. He was more dissatisfied with the last attempt than with the first; but the unwound clock that stands on every Parisian chimney-piece warned him to desist and begin a third letter, no less important than the others.

The third letter was addressed to Dr. Ranston. It was necessarily short, but sufficient, and ended with a strongly-worded request to use his discretion about the time and manner of giving the enclosed, meaning the letter to Everard, which he put in the same envelope. He then sealed the three letters and awaited the arrival of the Marquis's friend.

A little before seven he heard footsteps coming towards his door, then other footsteps behind, and then a knock. He opened the door, and a porter gave him a card. He took it without reading the name, and bowing to the figure behind, followed it downstairs. He found a carriage waiting outside, and drove off with his unknown second. Not a word was spoken. The second looked important, but Hubert never looked at him. Another reaction had begun: another picture was before him. He was thinking of the provocation and sounding its depth. The injustice, the

treachery, the immeasurable wrong, stretched out before him in a series of well-remembered scenes, from the beginning to the beginning of the end. In each the Marquis Moncalvo was the one figure that absorbed his attention. He saw the suddenly detected expression of his countenance in Foxhole Wood when he was speaking of Everard and the unsigned marriage settlements. He saw his subdued triumph at Netherwood, when Everard arrived there only to hear that Ida was already on the way to Italy. He saw him at Freville Chase, walking quietly upstairs to evade Everard's inquiries about the lost note. He saw him at Florence and Rome, scheming against Everard; achieving his purpose, escaping retribution, triumphing in complete success.

"But is it complete?" he thought. "No! I could see in his face that she hates him, loathes the sight of him. And am I to leave things as they are? shall I leave him to scheme against her better instincts and finish the murder of Everard? It were better to spare a tiger roaming at large on a village green."

This was his last word, his final conclusion. He smiled grimly and said to his companion:—

"By the by, I hope there is a weapon for me of some sort. I had none, of course, with me, and it was too late to get anything last night."

The second assured him that there was, and they relapsed into silence.

The day was now beginning to dawn. A cold grey light spread slowly among the trees in the Bois de Boulogne, sharpening their outlines gradually, so that they appeared to grow out of the mist. After going straight on through the wood for some distance, the carriage made several turns and then stopped. The second got out, and Hubert followed him into a secluded place, where he saw the Marquis, with two men, waiting for him a little way off. He quickened his pace without hurrying, and in a few moments reached the spot, but had hardly done so when he heard footsteps on the grass, and looking back, saw Elfrida close behind accompanied by two servants, one a lady's maid, the other a footman out of livery. She passed without any sign of recognition, placed herself in front of the Marquis, and looked at him for a few seconds without saying a word. The Marquis took off his hat, and bowed with the grace that

breeding and habit had made instinctive ; but he would have given much to be in any other part of the world, habitable or not, if he were only beyond the range of those terrible eyes that read him through and told him what they read. He cowered before them, feeling their power so exclusively that he was not even surprised at finding himself humbled to the dust by a girl of eighteen who had not as yet uttered a word. Hubert neither spoke nor moved, scarcely breathed. His second viewed the scene as simply dramatic, and awaited its conclusion in a state of pleasant excitement. The pause was really short but seemed interminable to the Marquis Moncalvo. His courage, though unquestionable, was of no use to him now. He stood shaking in his shoes, transfixed, fascinated, cowed.

"So this is your latest impulse of chivalry," said Elfrida in a voice that vibrated like a church bell. "You sent your servant, under the protection of hired roughs let loose from Ledchester gaol, to capture a poor woman who had been the faithful nurse of your sister's child, and whose only offence was that she knew your character too well. You schemed, with unheard-of treachery, to cheat your sister's stepson out of his betrothed wife, and took advantage of the intimacy you had acquired through him to compass your ends by suppression, silent insinuation and other sleight-of-hand arts that you know better than I can describe them. You suppressed her note to him at Freville Chase : you made his letters to her disappear at Florence : you kept her letter back just long enough to bring him to Rome—to bring him there only in time to see her when it was too late. In her presence, when she stood before him, dressed as your bride and appealing to him for protection from the unhallowed right you had acquired by violence of deceit, he spared your life in the heat of a life and death struggle ; and now when he is dying, when his life is slowly ebbing away in consequence of the tremendous effort he made to spare yours, you come here to murder his greatest, his dearest friend, the last heir of the Frevilles, in safety, knowing well your own advantage in the choice of a weapon that you were familiar with before he was born. Coward, liar, murderer, traitor to your own soul, perjured before God and man, false to every moral law divine and human, leave this place and go the way of your wickedness elsewhere, or—by Him who will judge us both

when nothing shall be hidden, I swear to you that I will publish your contemptible wickedness to the world."

The two seconds had approached respectfully, and Hubert's who knew enough of English to understand the purport of her words, looked at the Marquis for an explanation. The Marquis felt, as he had felt before, but in a very different sense, that he must *Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen.*

"I deserve your anger," he said, "and am not surprised at the hard words you have spoken. They do honour to you, and I have no wish to deny the wrong that I have done. But I must deny the intention you impute to me. I was carried away by my feelings, having no idea that Everard Freville felt as strongly as he did, and when I came here, compelled to do so by insults that I should not have noticed if they had not been given publicly, I chose the weapon that would enable me to disable my adversary without injuring him. I never meant to do more, and never would."

"Go, then," said Elfrida, "and may God give you the Grace of contrition for the sake of that one better thought!"

"A word more," said the Marquis, "and you shall be relieved of my presence. You referred to the delay of letters. I respectfully beg to decline being responsible for the postal arrangements in Florence. You have accused me of keeping the letter back that brought him to Rome too late. How was it possible for me to post a letter in Florence while I was then, and had been for many days previously, in Rome? This circumstance will at least prove to you the injustice of the accusation."

Elfrida gave no answer: she only raised her hand and pointed in the direction from which they had come. He stood for a moment irresolute, feeling the weakness of his plausible defence and earnestly desiring to strengthen it in her sight."

"Will you allow me to explain?" he said.

"Go!" she answered. "You have perjured yourself enough already."

He took off his hat, and bowing with unaffected reverence, went back with his friends into the road, where a carriage was waiting for him. When they had gone far enough to be out of her way, she followed with the two servants.

Hubert looked piteously at her as she passed him, and said :—

“ Won’t you speak to me ? Won’t you forgive me ? ”

She turned partly round without looking at him, and answered in a tone of repressed emotion :—

“ I have nothing to forgive ; but you have done all you could to destroy your family, hasten Everard’s death, and lose your own soul just at the time when God had given you the grace of faith. Make amends by asking *Him* to forgive you and by promising to accept His grace. The horrible fate you have risked ought to show you the danger of trifling with the Grace of God.”

“ But I really have not trifled with it,” said Hubert, following her as she went on. “ Do stop a moment and hear me.”

She did so, but stood on one side of him, and kept her eyes fixed on the ground. The servants went on in front to find the carriage.

“ I really have not trifled with it,” he repeated. “ I have done exactly what Everard advised.”

“ So I thought,” said Elfrida : “ but your rushing into this dreadful affair seemed so unaccountable.”

“ But you don’t know what the provocation was. I went out, feeling utterly cast down and reckless ”——

Elfrida turned pale and hurried on. He followed her, saying :—

“ Forgive me, if I have said more than I ought to say here ; but hear me for a moment. Don’t go away thinking worse of me than I deserve. I went out, hardly knowing what I did, and saw him walking with one of those men. I heard him complimented, admired, pleasantly bantered, for having blighted your sister’s life and murdered Everard with lies. I saw his face triumphant, malicious and scornful. I heard him say that he was not yet satisfied—never could be, never would be satisfied while Everard lives, that he would sacrifice anything to measure swords with him—would give his life to take his, Everard’s—yes, Everard’s. What could a poor fellow be expected to do, hearing that ? What would you have done, if you had been me and in my position ? ”

“ I am afraid that I should have done as you did ; but that doesn’t make it any better. Promise that you will never, never be tempted to do such a thing again.”

"I promise you that nothing shall ever make me do so. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes; but do you feel how wrong it would have been?"

"I do, indeed; and yet I can't feel sorry that the thing happened, since it was you who saved me from doing it. You have acted like yourself. I suppose that I mustn't say more about it now, and I don't know how I could put the truth more exactly. But how did you hear of it?"

"The servant went to post a letter, and heard what you said to that man under the Arcade. My maid told me, and so I ordered a carriage to be waiting for me at half-past six. I got in, and we watched you off, and followed you, keeping a little way behind, so that I could come up in time by walking fast. But there is the carriage: I can see it through the trees. Don't come any further."

"No; but mayn't I see you by and by, after breakfast?"

She said nothing, but he felt that her silence was the best answer. She walked on to the carriage and drove back to Paris. He waited a few minutes and paying the driver of his own carriage, took a circuitous way through the wood, and walked homewards, thinking of Elfrida.

It was half-past nine when he reached the hotel, for he walked slowly, and, being absent in mind, had missed the right turning more than once. He slipped upstairs into his room unobserved and, in half an hour, turned out newly dressed, as if he had been quietly in bed all night. By half-past ten he had breakfasted and was looking out for a favourable opportunity to see Elfrida. Just then he caught sight of Sir Richard coming downstairs and the servant giving him a letter. Sir Richard went out, the servant went back, and Hubert went forward.

"Is Lady Dytechley to be seen yet?" he said; and his heart beat so strongly that he could hear it.

"No sir," was the half-expected reply. "Her Ladyship is very tired after the journey, and"—

He heard nothing but the word "No," and presently found himself, he knew not how, standing unannounced before Elfrida, who was writing a note. On seeing him she changed colour and, for the first time in her life, appeared conscious of herself.

"Forgive my coming in this way," he said. "I had intended to wait, and certainly would have chosen a more

fitting occasion, but I can find no power in me to bear the suspense any longer. The first time I saw you at Netherwood I felt that my fate would depend on you, and I have felt so more and more ever since. I love you as Everard loved your sister—would that I were like him in any other respect! Such as I am, I have it in me to make you happy, if you will give me the right to show what I can be. My future life depends on a word from you. If you can find it in your heart to be my wife, you will not, I think, have cause to repent the choice altogether. If you cannot, God help me! I must bear it, I don't know how. Elfrida!—Can you—will you consent?"

"I can," she said in a voice that would have been inaudible to anyone else. "And I will, if"——

"What 'if' can there be, when you consent? You don't mean that your father"——

"No, I don't mean him. I have no doubt about that. I hardly know how to express what I mean—I am so afraid of bringing human motives in where they have no right to enter. Will you promise me not to be swayed by them in taking the step which your conscience is leading you to take?"

"I promise you that I will not let them add a feather's weight."

"Then," said Elfrida, turning very pale, "I may tell you what I hesitated to say, for fear of the influence it might have. I cannot marry you while you are not a Catholic."

"And if I were never to be—should you care?"

"Don't ask me," she said, drawing back. "You would have no right to know anything about me, if it were so. I never thought of that, never thought it possible, never would have believed."

"And you will never have cause to believe it. I have quite made up my mind. I only wanted to feel that you cared about me."

"Then why not ask? I would have told you. I *did* say as much."

"You did; but I longed for more, and in blundering after it, I have offended you."

"No," said Elfrida in a tone of intense earnestness, while tears welled up in her eyes. "Not offended. But don't try in that way another time. I can't bear it, indeed I can't."

"I promise you that I never will. It pains me enough to have done it once. But I really did long so much to feel more than sure. Then you *will*, without any ifs?"

"Yes, I will; for my confidence in you tells me that I may speak as my heart dictates. Are you satisfied now?"

"Satisfied? I never knew what the word meant before this moment."

"And yet," said Elfrida, "we shall understand it more perfectly in the perfect oneness of the one true faith."

"We shall. I know now what I once questioned in ignorance—the impossibility of true happiness in a mixed marriage. People try it, and see no harm, no doubt, in many cases, though how a Catholic can be so blind, I am unable to say; but whatever they may think, they are trying to do without Almighty God. I wished at one time to work out the question with Everard, from whom I got my first idea of Catholicity. But now it appears to me too evident to require investigation."

"You make me so very, very happy," said Elfrida; but tears were in her eyes, tears of mingled meaning. "I can't help it," she said. "I was thinking of Everard and the dreadful contrast between his fate and mine."

"And I," said Hubert, "was just contrasting it with my own, and wondering at the inscrutable ways of God. What good have I done? What has Everard not done that could be done in his short life? Without faith it would be a fearful puzzle to think that his life of marvellous beauty and worth is cut short, wrecked, apparently wasted, and I, who am worth nothing—Elfrida! why can't I deserve you a little?"

"You do—don't be morbid, or you will make *me* so. Ida was once a pattern to me, for she was better than me. What should I have done, if I had been tried as she has been tried? Yet she had the trial, and failed, whilst I, without any trial, have gained all that she has lost. I could feel as if I had, in a way, supplanted her—I could, indeed, were I to let my mind dwell on such thoughts. You must help me by example to keep them off. When must you go back?"

"I ought to start in about half an hour; but how can I be expected to do it. I suppose I must be off to-morrow."

A voice was heard outside the door, saying, "I saw him go into their room," and then a waiter brought in a telegram

from Beynham. Hubert took it and read these words :

"Lord de Freville seriously ill, and wishes to see you immediately."

There was no time for delay or hesitation. Scarcely a moment to say good-bye. But then he was sure of Elfrida, self had become objective, and the present was lost in the future.

CHAPTER XXVIII.



TEAM, by land and sea, brought Hubert Freville to Beynham before daybreak in the morning of the next day. "What is the matter?" he said, for he saw grave faces and there was a strange hush in the house. Lord de Freville was much worse than the message had expressed. The doctor gave no hopes of his recovery, and he had none himself; but he was not in immediate danger. He expressed a very earnest wish to see Everard, saying that he desired to die in the faith of his forefathers, that Everard had put him in the way of seeing the necessity, and could help him now better than any one else. When told that this was impossible, he could scarcely believe it, and repeated several times his conviction that Everard would by some means or other contrive to show him how. Hubert said that he might indeed, not directly, but indirectly by the help of Father Merivale, his confessor and greatest friend. Lord de Freville's countenance brightened, and then a shadow passed over it. He was thinking that the old faith would die out in the elder line as soon as it was revived. Hubert assured him that it would not, and explained his own position, his misgivings, his doubts, and his final conviction. Lord de Freville's face brightened again, and then another shadow came over it. Hubert again saw what he meant, and told him about Elfrida. The shadow passed away, but he was anxious to know how soon Father Merivale could come. Hubert wrote a pressing letter, and sent a servant with it to Freville Chase by the next train.

Soon afterwards the post brought a letter from Dr. Ranston, telling him that Everard was about to start for England and would probably be at Freville Chase in a fortnight or three weeks.

"I find him so anxious to be at home," he wrote, "that I think it more prudent not to offer any opposition. I shall of course accompany him home, and stay a day or two, to see how he goes on after the journey, when I shall hope to meet you. I am anxious that you should be with him as much as you can. He is not in a fit state to be safely left alone; and, if I am not strangely mistaken there are reasons, whatever they may be, why your presence is particularly advantageous to him."

After reading this he went back to his uncle's room and, finding him inclined to sleep, lay down on a sofa. Tired out by incessant travelling and want of rest, he fell asleep and slept on until late in the afternoon.

The sun had set more than an hour when he was awakened by the butler, who said that Father Merivale had just come. He jumped up, and opening the door, saw him standing outside.

"I don't know how to thank you enough for this," he said.

"It was my duty to come, if I could," said Father Merivale, "and I had no difficulty in doing it. I had your letter in time to catch the one o'clock train, and as a priest was staying with me at the time, I could get my work done. You have come straight from Rome, haven't you? How did you leave him?"

"Better," said Hubert. "He is starting to come home gradually. I have just had a letter from Dr. Ranston."

They came into the room, and Hubert, after introducing him, went downstairs to break his long fast, having eaten nothing since the tidal train stopped at Amiens. On his way into the dining-room he was told that a foreign woman wanted to see him.

"Can't she wait a little?" he said. "I have had nothing to eat since yesterday afternoon."

The butler ruled that she must wait, whether she could or not, and bustling off, brought in a cold pheasant. Hubert sat down to it in a sad and meditative mood, wondering at the alternations of joy and sorrow that life had lately shown him.

"It puzzles one's heart," he thought, as he rose from the table. Elfrida is mine, and Everard is stricken to death. I come home to find my good uncle a Catholic—and see him die. But this foreign woman, what can she want?"

He rang the bell, and said, "I am ready to see her—but where? What is she?"

The butler thought that the justice room would be a proper place, and thither he brought the alien, who entered in a snakelike manner, looking up furtively with eyes that saw without being seen.

"Your very most humble servitor," she said. "This is a most happiest day for me."

"I wish I could say the same," answered he gravely. "But what can I do for you?"

"It is I what will do something for you," said the woman of the middling countenance; for she it was and no one else.

"Thank you. What is it?"

"I know one big secret about you, that should make you to be nobody at all; but give me money that you shall owe to me, and nobody shall know nothing."

"I don't care whether they know nothing or something," said Hubert. "You must have mistaken me for some one else."

"No, no. I do not mistake. Let me speak, and you shall see. You do not know yet what you are."

"I never said that I did. Few people do."

"No, no, no. That is not it. I shall explain myself. You are not the son of him that they called your father. Have you understood?"

"Yes, I hear what you say."

"Listen then. Were you not born in Italy?"

"Yes. What of that?"

"And you was took here by two nurses, an English and an Italian?"

"I believe so."

"Then the Italian am I. Do not you remember me?"

"No."

"Well, you was very leetle; but look and see."

"Small as I was," thought Hubert, "I could hardly forget so unpleasant a face."

"No," he said. "I don't remember you, and (excuse me

for doubting your word) I don't believe that I ever saw you."

"Wait a leetle. You believe yourself the son of the brother of this grand lord here, and that he sent you over to England when his wife, your supposed mother, died: but you are not that child at all. The real child took an illness and died on the journey—he died at Alassio—and then we said (I and the other nurse), what shall we ever do? The grand lord will say that it was our fault, that we did not take care of him, and will not believe us, and will make us be put in prison"—

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Hubert.

"We was afraid—I tell it to you. I," answered the woman, "and you shall be afraid, but much more. You shall tremble in your boots. You laugh when I tell you that we was afraid, but you shall not laugh when you shall have heard what we did. We saw my cousin at Alassio, and I got from a friend of hers the child of an Italian, and then we brought him home to the grand lord, and made him for to think that it was the son of his brother. You was the child that we took to him. The eyes of the true child were blue, and his hair was white-yellow. Your eyes and your hair are coal-black, like your Italian parents. But the grand lord's brother died in Italy soon after, and never came home—he was very bad when we left it—and so we never could be found out. And if he had come, and said, 'Why is he become black?' we had agreed to say that the colour of his hair and eyes had grown dark, as in leetle children they sometimes do. I know very well that you are not the son of the brother of Lord de Freville."

"Are you aware," said Hubert, "that if this were true, you would be liable to prosecution for conspiracy?"

"Yes, yes—dear sare, and I know that there is no one here but you and I, and that it is your interest not to tell—even more than it is mine. Suppose that you shall say that I told you such and such things? Well! I shall deny it—What should you do then?—eh? eh? But it is your interest not to tell—this I say. It is I that will tell, if you do not pay me money. If I tell, and prove it, as I can do, you will be one beggar like me—you will be nobody. Treat me well, and you shall always be the son of the grand lord."

"But what proofs have you to support this cock and bull story?"

"Proofs? Very good proofs. There is one other person"—

"Who is it?"

"I not tell till I choose. I keeps it always hanging over your head. You give me money—or that person shall swear that I tell the truth."

"And be prosecuted, both of you, for conspiracy."

"I do not care. I am a miserable what has no other hope; and if you do not give me money, I reveal all. Then you will be the child of nobody. How does it appear to you? No name, no money. Oh! I am a good woman, very just. I have gone to Freville Chase, to him what is the true heir, because I am just. But I am poor, I tell him so, and it is just that my service be paid. What do you think that he said, that beastly bigot? He ask me when I go to the black priest to confess myself! Figure to yourself the rage! You what are a good Protestant"—

"The devil I am!" muttered Hubert.

"You what hate the Pope and the priest, what you think of that?"

"Go on," said Hubert. "I take it he didn't give you any money, did he?"

"Money? No! I went away for my own affairs, and you shall keep it all. But I am a miserable—without bread."

"How was it, then, that you came here in a fly?"

"That was the last money. I sell my watch last week. I hate that Jesuit at Freville Chase—Sare Freville; and you must hate him, for he is the heir what would rob you of your name, your gold, your big park. Now give me only twenty pounds for to eat, and you shall be safe. But I hope that you will be grateful to a poor woman what has nothing, and give her a leetle pension for serving you so much."

"In other words," an unlimited draw "under pain of discovery," thought Hubert. "I wonder what the dodge is. There is some dirty trick, and I must get to the bottom of it. I see I must dissemble a bit."

He made a small gesture of constructive assent, and said:—

"So he asked you when you had last been to confession, did he?"

"Oh! that clerical beast! Do not speak of him never no

more. I would not help him now—no, not if he offer me ten thousand pounds. But he think that I did deceive him, and it is he what is deceived, ha, ha ! That make me laugh.”

“Did you tell him all you have told me ?”

“No, no. I only tell him that he should have much gold. That was enough for him, and also too much.”

“So he didn’t give you any money to help you on ?” said Hubert, affecting surprise.

“Not one penny for to buy a bread, I swear it to you. He mock my misery, the hypocrite, and tell me to go to the great fat priest—I what am good Protestant like you. He has not heart no more than a stone ; and he hate you, I swear it. If he have what is yours, he will not give you a bread, though you beg on your knees. Come now ! Do not you hate him ?”

Hubert nodded in an absent manner, as if acknowledging the fact cautiously to himself.

“There ! I knowed it well,” said she.

“Why, of course, one must”——

“Yes, it is a just rage. I have to it so much sympathy.”

“To be sure. It is quite natural. We are sailing in the same boat, as they say, you and I. Now I will tell you how we can arrange matters in a way that will be satisfactory to us both. You see, business is business, and however much I may believe your word, it would not be right to proceed further without the evidence of the other witness. You will not risk anything by it ; for you hold the security of all my prospects, and if I were to play false, you would have your revenge, and get as much money as you like, by merely going to Freville Chase and telling him what you have told me.”

“No ; it shall not be ever.”

“Does she live in this country ?” said Hubert, making a random shot and looking as if he knew more than she supposed.

The woman of the middling countenance was startled, and after a short consultation with herself, was of opinion that she had better make a merit of telling what, after all, would be no use to him.

“I shall tell it to you,” she said, “for I have so much sympathy—I what was your nurse. It is my weakness. I am made so. The woman do live in this country.”

"I had better make another shot, as this one has gone straight," thought Hubert. "Let me see. She may know somebody near there who told her about Everard's brother dying in Italy; and between them they have made out this wonderful tale. Lyneham would be the nearest town where any one would be likely to have heard of that. There is no harm in trying."

"Are you sure," he said, "that she doesn't live at Lyneham?"

"Oh!" said the woman, trying to avoid his eyes by pretending to laugh.

"I know she lives there," said he; "so you had better tell me the truth. If you don't, I can easily find it out; and then, you know, she will get the money and hold her tongue. Your statement would then be worth nothing. You would only be prosecuted, for trying to extort money from me on false pretences, and sent to prison."

"Ah!" said she quickly, expanding her mouth into the mildest grin of which it was capable. "You was always so clever. But I only joked with you. I was going for to tell you where she lives."

"All right, I can guess who she is."

"*Già s'intende.* The great lord think she bring the son of his brother to him, and give her the money for to be married. She married and went to America, and then she come back after she was widow, and now she is the mistress of the, White Hart at Lyneham."

"Does she mean to say," thought Hubert, "that the landlady of the White Hart at Lyneham is my old nurse? Were it so, wouldn't she have come to Beynham to see us? I must go at once to the White Hart, and see what this means. I wonder what sort of a woman she really is, and what they are at."

"Very well," he said, "You see I had the clue. Now this is what I will do—and a very good bargain it is for you. I shall go to Lyneham by the first train in the morning, and I will meet you at the White Hart between ten and eleven. Here is a sovereign for your expenses there; and if she and you can prove the truth of the story you tell me, you shall be rewarded. You are quite secure, you know, because you have the game in your own hands."

"Basta," said she holding out her hand for the sovereign.

Hubert put the coin there, and the woman of the middling countenance went forth again to disturb the hapless landlady of the White Hart.

"A very ingenious way of extorting money," thought Hubert, as he left the room after bowing her out; "but she might have got it up better."

CHAPTER XXIX.

Sua confessione juguletur necesse est.

—Cic. CONTRA VERREM.



UBERT went by the six o'clock train to see the landlady and ferret out the trick. The woman of the middling countenance had not put up at the White Hart, but she appeared at half-past eleven in the morning to prime her restive confederate for the cross-examination.

The latter was in a comparatively cheerful frame of mind, having just repaid old Susan and supplied a big dinner the day before, when, happening to look up, she recognised through the glass door a face of evil omen. The sight was so unpleasant and the prospects it unfolded so alarming that she forgot prudence as well as dignity, and turning her broad back to the glass door, retreated, as far as the laws of space would permit, into a sort of recess between the window and a large cupboard, but had not been there half a minute, when she heard a light step behind, felt a playful tap on the shoulder and saw the middling countenance peering round at her familiarly.

"Ah! my dear," said her tormentor. "What pleasure!
à proprio un"——

"Now don't begin your gibberish," interrupted the landlady, forcing her way out of the recess. "One can't even put the linen away without having you come prying about."

"Do you put the leenen inside the wall, my dear? Well,

never mind! I am not come for no money now. I am come to tell you good news. Oh! but you shall dance for joy! Give me one kiss, my dear friend."

"Get away!" grunted the landlady, putting out her hands in a defensive position.

"Ah! the human ingratitude!—when I have been all over the earth for to save you money! Hear now what I shall have done for you. I have seen the man what was the child at Alassio, Master Freville, and told him that his gold and his big park and the beasts with the corns on their heads, are not his, if he do not pay money to close our mouths. Eh? eh? And he promise to give it to us! What you think of that?"

The landlady's face had become crimson, and her breathing might have been heard outside the glass door. What?" she roared. "You great idiot! You have ruined my character and your own too, only you haven't any—ruined us both for ever, I say; and you won't get a penny from him. Don't you know an English gentleman when you see one? Couldn't you see by the look of him that young Mr. Hubert Freville (hold your tongue now, and never mind who the child was) would lose everything sooner than keep his property by telling lies or bribing such a creature as you to tell them for him?"

"Feedelsticks!—that was your word. All very grand on the *palco scenico*, but is not true in the human life. I tell you that he hate the rival—that Jesuit there at Freville Chase. I know it, for I ask him, and he incline his head."

"Rubbish! I know better. They were the best of friends when he was staying at Freville Chase last August, and when the young squire was ill in Rome he sat up with him night after night. I know that, for the valet who is with the young squire wrote word of it to the person that told me. Why didn't you go to the man who helped you to take in everybody and drag me into the mess? I thought you meant that man of course when you talked about getting money from somebody."

"No, no: he is only a camerière: and also I could not find him."

"Well, you *have* made a mess of it, and if you have no shame, I have. I declare I'll leave the place now directly. I can't face it. I'll run right away, just as I am."

"Then you must run into the wall where you keep the leenen, for he will come in few minutes. Courage! You so fat—and to be afraid of him! Oh! Listen now. There is a carriage at your door. It is him. Have you understood? Now you are with the shoulders to the wall. It touches to you to save you the skin. If not—h'm!—you are proper lost; because I shall say then that you have paid me money for to hold my tongue about you. Do as I say to you I—and you shall be rich, oh! so rich!"

"I daresay. Be quiet now. Do you want to be heard by everybody? Can't you see the waiter taking him into that sitting-room? Get into this other room, till I call you. We mustn't be seen going in together."

She opened the glass door, pushed the woman into a little room, close by, and went back to meditate.

The waiter followed and announced that Mr. Freville wanted to see her.

"In one moment," said she, pretending to look at some bills. Her meditation was short, sharp and decisive. It was short, inasmuch as there were only two things to be considered, the necessity of telling the truth and the consequences of doing so. It was sharp, for she felt as if horse-flies were stinging her all over. It was decisive, because escape was impossible.

"It's no use now," she thought. "That beast and fool has been and told him, and she can prove it, and get me made to prove it in a witness-box. *He* won't be a party to the lie—I know that—and my lord will take the law against us, and we shall get transported, and I shall be chained to her for life, and have to work in the mines along with her! There's just one thing though, to be sure. They say the young squire is coming home to die; and as he's the last, and there's no other of the family, Mr. Hubert mightn't perhaps like to let it all go away nowhere. For nobody would be righted then. It can't be worth while to ruin himself and make an end of the family, all for one who is dying."

A little comforted by this last idea, she slid past the little room where the dangerous visitor awaited her summons, and opening the other door as gently as possible, stood before Hubert, or rather shuffled about on her feet till the boards creaked under her weight.

"Oh! sir," she said: "Pray don't put any trust in her—not that I mean to say it isn't true in a way—and I'm sure I've been that miserable at it, and cried my eyes out many a time all these years, and she coming and throwing it in my face, and getting money out of me till I had hardly a shilling to carry on with, and threatening to expose it all, just as if I had been the one to do it and let her in, when it was her all the time. I've led the life of a dog, I have. It *was* her—it was indeed, sir. I can take my Bible oath to that. And it does look as if God Almighty made it to come right after all—doesn't it, sir?—for it wouldn't do good to any one, to let it all go right away, as it would if, as they say, there will soon be not one of the family left—for they tell me that the young squire is dying. Oh, dear! don't look so, sir. I hope you won't be hard on a poor creature that was deceived by that base woman there, and made to do what I wouldn't have done for all the world—that I wouldn't, sir, if you'll believe me. And if you'll please to listen, I can prove my words—that I will, sir, indeed."

"Don't be frightened," said Hubert, in the gentlest of tones. "I am not going to do you any harm. I only want to ask you a question."

"That's just what I want to tell you, sir, and I'm sure I have no other wish than"——

"I am sorry to interrupt you, but I must go back by the one o'clock train. The woman came to me yesterday, and said that she and you were travelling from Italy to Beynham, in charge of Lord de Freville's nephew, when the child died at Alassio, that she and you agreed to take home another child instead, and that I was the child you took to him as his nephew, instead of the child who died. Is this true?"

"Well sir, I am sorry to say it is, in a way; but I hope you won't"——

"I won't get you into any trouble at all. On the contrary I will make it worth her while to leave you alone for the future, if you tell me the whole truth. Tell me the facts as clearly as you can, and in as few words as possible."

"I will sir," she said, crumpling the skirts of her dress with all the fingers of both hands to repress her volubility. "I lived nurse in Mr. Freville's family, that was the brother of my lord, and when the child was to go to Beynham

because he was the only one and the heir, after his poor mother died, I was sent with him, and this Italian woman too—she was nurserymaid under me, for we were two, he being so precious. Mr. Freville, he couldn't go himself, because he was so ill, and died not very long after at Sorrento, where he was when we left, and promised me a hundred pounds if I brought the child safe to Beynham. I did all I could, and never left him out of my sight for a moment, as you may say. However, in spite of all my care, he took ill, but I couldn't make out what the doctor called it, where we was stopping for the night—Alassio they called the place, I think—and he went off very quick, with only an Italian doctor there, and nothing to be had much. Well, sir, I was distracted like, for I was very partial to the poor child ; and besides, that hundred pounds would be the making of me, which I was engaged to be married and we was to have bought the good-will of a small business with it. That woman began to howl like a mad thing, all out of pretence and mischief, and kept on saying (only I can't speak in her way) ' You are ruined—you are ruined—you, not me. He gave you the charge, and he promise you money—I know all about that. And now instead of giving you the money, he will have you sent to prison. They will ask me what you gave the child. Now I saw you give him something at night ' (it was a little magnesia), ' and I must shrug my shoulders. Then you will go to prison and be hanged for murder.' I was so put about that I hadn't the sense to see it was all nonsense, with a doctor attending. I really didn't know what to do : I was in such a way. Well, a few minutes after, she comes again, making up a face to pretend she felt for me, and she says, ' I have saved you. I have found a child of the same age, that you can take to England. I have arranged it all. Leave it to me, and it shall all be done before you are out of bed to-morrow morning. You know they would give anything for an heir, and here he is, to save everything. My lord will have an heir; and he won't miss the other, because he won't know he isn't him. You'll be doing a lot of good to the family—particularly as you've heard 'em say that, if anything happened to Mr. Freville's little son, the next heir is a Catholic. So, if you don't do as I say, you'll bring it to that, besides being hung for murder.' "

"That was how she talked sir, 'only it was in broken

English, with bits of Italian and a lot of acting about. I didn't know what to do ; for there I was, and it seemed fair, upset as I was, and nobody by to say a word. But said I, 'No : I can't put off nobody's child on them.' I was so bothered, you see, that I didn't see rightly that it couldn't be proper anyhow. 'Well,' says she, 'if you'll promise not to tell, I can make you comfortable about that. You see, the father of the child I mean is a prince, and he has married again, and his second wife is a sort of a woman,—you understand,—that means her own son to be the only heir, and wouldn't be particular what she did. If you don't take the child to my lord, who will have no heir at all without him, and have you hanged as a murderer besides, that poor child will have a bad chance, I can tell you, and a beauty he is.' And then she began to make a lot of dumb show, as if she was showing he'd be made away with. 'But,' says she, 'if you'll take him to my lord, and let me have the dead child to give to the nurse for the princess, it will be all right for everybody. And I've got a cousin, a servant in this town,' says she, 'who is engaged to the *camerière* that lives in the family, and so I know all about it ; and you shall satisfy yourself that I am not deceiving you,' says she, 'for I'll bring him to see you, and you can talk to him. He speaks English, and you can ask him.' I was hard pressed, and what she said seemed fair enough to a poor creature that hardly knew what she was about ; but it didn't seem right somehow, though I couldn't say why—I was that flabbergasted. So she went out ; and then, by and by, she brought the man—I didn't like the looks of him, not at all, I didn't,—and the child was with him, a little beauty to be sure !' The man, he told me his mistress was a great lady, and would give me five thousand lire (that's two hundred pounds, you know, sir) and said he'd bring the child next morning, if so be he heard nothing more. Well, sir, the dear child (that was you, sir) put out its little arms so piteous-like when the man was taking it away, as if it was looking to me for protection. Indeed, sir, if you'll believe me, I couldn't stand it, to see the dear child left in that way at the mercy of such a vagabond, and no mother, and no father, as you may say. So I says to the woman, 'What's to be done to save him ?' 'Nothing,' says she, 'if you won't. He must take his chance.' And then she shrugged her shoulders again and

began to howl in her way. And then they went away, and the next morning I found the dear child in my room, and the coffin with the dead child in it was gone. 'What have you been and done?' says I. The woman grinned, for all the world like a monkey, and told me that the dead child had been buried, and the carriage and all was ready, and we must be off to England in half an hour; and then she gave me the money in a bag that the man had left for me. 'But,' I says, 'the *vetturino* will see it isn't the same child.' 'I've got another,' says she, 'and the old one has been paid off.' 'Who by?' says I. 'Why them that wanted it done, of course,' says she. 'Don't ask questions, but let's get ourselves off. You have saved a beautiful child and a great family, and there's no harm in his not being the other one, for he's a deal better. And besides, you ain't answerable about that, because he's been put here just as if an angel had brought him. And then' says she, 'it will set you up in life respectable.' "What was I to do sir, caught in a trap like that, and no way out but what would make matters worse? I brought you to Beynham, and my lord he gave me the hundred pounds and then I married. I persuaded my husband to try America, for I felt so uncomfortable in England, and couldn't bear to look any one in the face here. He was quite agreeable, and we went and lived out there eleven years, till he died. Then I came back; for I thought 'What's the use of trying to get away from what's been done and can't be undone?' So I took this place, for I come from near Bramscote; and then that woman found me out, and has robbed and pestered me ever since, 'till my life isn't worth having, and I'd rather go to the gallows than go on so."

Here the poor woman began to cry.

"Don't be distressed," said Hubert, gently. "You have nothing to fear."

"Thank you, sir, I'm sure, said she, struggling to repress her sobs, lest they should attract the middling countenance prematurely to the spot. "There's no one in the world so fitted to be my lord's heir as you are; and it would be a sin and a shame to see the family die out for the sake of making over your rights to the young squire, who is as good a gentleman as ever was, but can't live long."

"He is the greatest friend I have in the world," said

Hubert sternly ; "and were he not so, he must have his rights, if only for one hour. Have you any further evidence to give ? Your statement appears to me straightforward, and so far credible ; but have you anything to corroborate it, besides the word of that ill-looking woman ? "

"Yes sir, I have. There's a letter, or, I should say, a packet sealed up, and in it a small miniature of the child that died, and a lock of his hair. Mrs. Freville gave it into my charge for my lord, and told me what was inside ; but there ! I got into the mess, and couldn't get out, and I was afraid to give it, because he would have seen the difference ; for the child had light hair and blue eyes, as you will see in the picture. I'll go and get it sir, if you'll be pleased to wait a moment."

"Do ; but I have a word to say first. Have you any kind of certificate from the doctor who attended the child ? There must be something of the sort, to say what he died of."

"Yes sir, there was ; and as we were driving from that evil place, I looked in my bag and missed it. 'Whatever have you done with it ? ' 'I said, for I suspected it was her.' 'I gave it to my cousin,' says she. 'She that's engaged to the man.' 'What use is it to them,' says I, 'with the child having an English name, and all that ? ' 'I can't say about that,' she says ; 'but it's my belief she wants it for another business, only she wouldn't say.' 'And then she winked at me very cunning ; 'but,' she says, 'it would never do for it to be found with us ; and my cousin she gave us an English sovereign for it, and here is the money.'"

"What could I do, sir ? It was true that having the certificate then could do us no good, only harm ; and she kept on saying that it was all for the best, and we had saved a dear child's life from those that wished him ill. So what could I do."

"Well, it can't be helped," said Hubert. "Bring me the packet, if you please."

She opened the door softly, stole out of the room, and soon returned with a sealed packet in her hand. Hubert looked at the seal and recognised the impression of a seal-ring, given to him when a child, as having belonged to his supposed mother."

"Will you please to open it sir," suggested the landlady.

"No, not here : it is directed to Lord de Freville. I must take it home."

"Oh ! sir, you won't show it to my lord, I hope."

"Don't be frightened. I promise that no harm shall happen to you."

"Yes sir, I know how good you are. But if his lordship knows it, what will become of me ? oh dear ! oh dear !"

The poor creature's lamentations were so imprudently loud that they penetrated the partition wall, and in came the woman of the middling countenance as fierce as a dragon.

"You wicked devil !" she yelled out, "you believe to get it all yourself by telling your own lies as it pleases to you ; but I shall have my revenge—believe me, I shall. I shall scream it through all the town. It imports not to me. I did not bring the child to you. I did not take him and give him to my lord for the son of his brother."

"Perhaps not," said Hubert ; "but you were an accomplice, and if you get her into trouble, you will get yourself into the same, I promise you."

"Excuse. I had not the intention to do her no wrong. It was the rage"

"So much the better for you. I am glad you came in, for I have something to say that concerns you to know. You think that I am going to benefit myself by your information and pay you to keep it secret. Understand me, once for all. I am not the sort of man to keep what isn't mine : and besides that, the man you suppose me to hate as you hate him—because you hate everything that isn't bad like yourself—is the best and dearest friend I have, or ever could have. If the story prove correct, as it appears to be, I shall lose no time in establishing his rights."

"You big, fat fool !" said the woman, turning on the landlady like a cat spitting at an overgrown puppy. "You hypocrite, what ought to be a *monaca*, if you were a Christian"——

"*Basta così !*" said Hubert decisively ; and his eyes corroborated the statement. "I can't stay to hear any more strong language. Now attend to what I say, for I must be going. You must remain here a few days, and you must come with her when I send for you both, and you must give straightforward answers to such questions as may be put to you. If you do that"——

"Misericordia ! They will put me in the galley."

"No, they won't. I will answer for your safety."

"You will protect the poor leetle woman ?"

"I have already told you that you shall be quite safe."

"And you will not forget to give some little reward ?"

"You mustn't talk about being rewarded for passing off one child as another and trying to make money out of it, first from one side, and then from the other. You are getting off very easily, I can tell you that. But I will make you a present as alms, because you tell me that you are poor, and if you can tell me the name of my real father and mother, and show me sufficient evidence to prove it, I will make you a very handsome present."

The middling countenance fell, and the answer came in a whimpering tone. "I should not know," she said. "My cousin not married herself with the man. She go to France, I do not know in what part of it, and she never would tell to me the name of the man nor of the prince."

Hubert felt himself turning deadly pale, as he thought of Elfrida and his own nameless identity ; but the very thought made him regain command over himself, and he said with apparent calmness :

"It can be done. I can help you to do it. Lord de Freville will pay the expenses of your journey, I know, if I can't. It must be done."

Then he turned to the landlady and said in a softer voice, "I must go now. I depend on you to be ready with the evidence, yours and hers, when I shall want it, which will be very soon. Be assured that you will not lose by it."

"Anything I can do, I'm sure I will, and be thankful," said the landlady, "And I was just going to remark that there was a foreigner came here last August who looked to me very like the man we were talking of. He came here with nothing to do that I could see, and ordered a lot of kickshaws for his dinner, to make believe he was a gentleman. He was got up to disguise himself, so I thought, and seemed the very man, only I couldn't justly swear to him. I don't know where he went."

"I don't think much of that," said Hubert ; "but however that may be, you will find it worth your while, both of you, to discover what I want to know. Just write her name for me in full, if you please, on the back of this card."

She did so, and he left the room, saying as she followed him out, "Remember, I hold you responsible for her appearance when she is wanted. You must keep her here, for you musn't lose sight of her. She isn't a pleasant guest, I know; but I can't help that. It *must* be done."

He then left the house.

"Good gracious!" thought the unfortunate landlady. "Whatever am I to do? What will they all think, to see her here with me, after my sending her off as I did three months ago? It's too much for any one, it is. I'll sit down and have a good cry."

She retired into her bedroom, fulfilled her purpose comfortably in an arm-chair and having settled her cap, went back refreshed into Number 1 sitting room, where the middling countenance was waiting.

"You may stay in the house till you are wanted," she said, "and you can sit in the room where you were just now. They will show you your bedroom presently, and bring your things from the Brown Bear, if that was where you put up last night."

"Yes, but are you sure that I shall not be put in the galley? If not, I escape away. Do not tell me lies for I shall see them in your fat face."

"And don't you be a fool, after getting off so cheap. Don't you know a gentleman when you see him? Do as he tells you, and you will find it to your advantage. You go into that sitting-room. I'll send you the 'Ledchester Gazette,' to amuse you, and give orders about your things. I can't stay any longer, for I have lots of business to do."

"Then I shall have the felicity to remain with my dear old friend. Your company shall be dear to me."

The landlady bounced out of the room, muttering, "None of that nonsense now," and the woman of the middling countenance retired into the small sitting-room, where, after turning over a few leaves of "The Sunday at Home" in a dejected spirit, she tried to amuse herself by looking out of the window at such objects as a country town affords for inspection on market days.





CHAPTER XXX.



EXACTLY three weeks and five days after Hubert's interview with the landlady of the White Hart and the woman of the middling countenance, Mrs. Roland was preparing for Everard's return to Freville Chase. Hubert had written beforehand, advising her to get ready the king's room for him, because it was on the groundfloor, and saying that he would be there himself before four o'clock, about which time Everard was expected. His train was late, and he had to walk from the station with his carpet-bag in his hand, having forgotten to tell her what train he was coming by ; so that it was nearly four when he passed the old gatehouse. He found Mrs. Roland in the hall, looking out for Everard.

"It was so kind of you to write sir, about the king's room," she said, and then she burst into tears.

Hubert pressed her hand warmly, and said :

"I hope we shall find him better."

She shook her head sadly, keeping her eyes fixed on the gatehouse.

"He was better when I left Rome," said Hubert, "and his constitution is very strong."

"Yes sir : but that isn't it. You may break anything by straining it the wrong way. I was afraid, all along, that something would happen. It looked so bad, that going off abroad and making believe it was health. But, if you please, sir, what was it that made him take that dreadful ride across country to catch the train, and then travel all the way as he was? That alone was enough to kill him."

"Why, that scoundrel got hold of her letter and kept it

back, on purpose to make him too late."

Anne, who had been watching behind the portière for Everard's arrival, could restrain herself no longer.

"Please, sir," said she, coming forward and curtsying, "I kept on telling them he ought to be took up."

Hubert smiled faintly, but was altogether too anxious and miserable to be amused even for an instant.

"You were quite right," he said. "I only wish it could have been done."

"Well, sir, but mightn't he have been took up for a vagrant, when he was caught a-poking about in the tower late at night?"

"What's the use of talking like that?" said Mrs. Roland in a tone of melancholy reproof, "when you know he was visiting in the house all the time?"

"But he had no business in there," persisted Anne, "and it's my belief—but however, it doesn't signify talking—it's too late now. I was afraid that something would happen sir—you won't think me superstitious—but it must have been four, maybe five nights after the squire went away, and I was lying awake grieving for him and knowing what a journey he must have had in all that bitter weather, when I heard the Freville bell, that betokens the death of a Freville, sounding far away over the Chase woods. I couldn't mistake it, though I hadn't heard it for many years, and it tolled all through that dreadful night. The next morning, your telegraph, sir, came to tell us how ill he was, and then"—

"Hush!" said Mrs. Roland. "Isn't that the carriage?"

The whole household had now collected together silently in the hall, as if by magic, and in a few moments the wreck of Everard Freville was brought to the door in the old family coach—drawn by the horses that he had chosen for Ida.

The change in his appearance was startling, yet no one, however slightly acquainted with him, would have doubted his identity. The powerful frame had lost nothing of its form, but its elastic vigour was gone, and he moved slowly, with a perceptible effort. His face was very pale, almost white, with a slight tinge of a delicate pink at times, like the inside of a shell. The old smile was there, and more beautiful than ever, but its expression was purely objective as if self had no longer a place on earth.

Mrs. Roland's fortitude gave way when she saw him. She seized both his hands, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"But I am so much better now," he said. "Dr. Ranston will tell you that I am."

"Do try," said she. "We shall all break down and go to rack and ruin, if you don't."

She walked on, and after a few words of kindly greeting to the other servants, he followed her across the hall.

"Mr. Hubert," she said, "thought that the king's room would be best for you to sleep in, because—you would be tired."

"Thank you and him both. I was just thinking how convenient it would be."

"I have got it all ready, and brought everything down that I thought you would like to have there, if you please to look. I didn't get ready the tower-room, but both fires have been burning for several days in the great gallery."

"Is Father Merivale at home?" asked Everard. "I should like so much to see him."

"No, sir. He was obliged to go to Exbourne, but he will be back soon."

Hubert had waylaid Dr. Ranston in the hall, and after a few words of inquiry, said :—

"Would it be safe to speak to him on an important and painful subject that he *must* hear very soon?"

"Does it refer to what has made him as he now is?" said Dr. Ranston, as they walked into the gallery.

"No, it has nothing to do with that."

"Then you may, and the sooner the better. He has borne the journey pretty well, and got through his most touching reception. You had better say what you have to say as soon as possible, for there will be a reaction—probably to-morrow."

"You don't mean anything serious, I hope?"

"No—I trust not. But if it ought to be said soon, it should be said now. I must tell you that when we were in London yesterday, I called in two of the best men I know, for the heart, to see him, and we had a long consultation. They examined him with the utmost attention, and it grieves me more than I can express to tell you that their opinion of his case was not more hopeful than my own. He insisted

on being present all the time during the consultation, and when we had finished, he said, without the slightest change of countenance, that he had never had any other opinion after he had begun to get better."

At that moment Everard came into the gallery. Dr. Ranston after saying a few words about the beauty of the room and of the place altogether, retired till dinner-time on the plea of having letters to write.

Everard unwittingly introduced the subject by asking how Lord de Freville was.

"He was rather better again when I left," said Hubert ; "but the doctors, I am sorry to say, give me no hope of his recovery. Did you get my letter in Paris, telling you all about him—that he had been so anxious to see you?"

"I did, and from things he said when I was at Beynham I half expected to hear what that letter told me. The beautiful simplicity of his character would be sure to lead him straight, if he could see his way at all. It was a delightful surprise to find you here ; but, if he is in so critical a state you ought not to stay."

"No, I thought of going back as early as I can to-morrow, or, if you think it better, by the mail train to-night. I was obliged to come, first and foremost because I should not have felt satisfied without seeing for myself how you were, and secondly because I have some things to say that are of extreme importance, that you *must* know, and that you will hear best by word of mouth from me. There is nothing in them that concerns you, as *yourself*—you understand me?"

"I do, and thoroughly appreciate your way of putting it : but you needn't be afraid, in any case. Whatever it may be, it can't well be worse than what I have heard and seen and known and inferred. I have heard one thing that I did want to hear very much. I mean your being engaged to Elfrida. She is a noble girl, one whose equal it would be hard indeed to find, and I don't know any one so fitted for her as yourself. I saw her in Paris on my way through. She came to see me. I heard of your having been there, and all about it but not from her, till the maid who came with her, had told me in spite of her."

"I was going to tell you myself. It was very wrong, I know ; but what could a fellow do, in such a position as I found myself in?"

"I know exactly how it was, for I drew it out of her. I am quite sure that, if I had been you, just as you were then, I should have done the same. But don't do such things again, for you know better now."

"I promise you that nothing shall induce me to do it, whatever provocation I may have. But I hope they will keep him out of my way. Have you heard what she did?"

"Yes. It was just what I should have expected her to do. I know what she is. You have won a treasure, even greater perhaps than you are yet fully aware of. You will, I know, make the most of it."

"You may rest assured that I will, if I can: but things have happened since that no one can alter, and they have put me into a difficulty with regard to her that nothing can mend. Didn't an Italian woman come here last October and try to get money out of you for promising to tell you of a property that you ought to have?"

"Yes, and became abusive at not getting it. She called me a Jesuit, an aristocrat sucking the blood of the peoples, and so on. I think she began by promising to make me an alderman."

"I daresay. She was likely enough to make that sort of mistake. But what she really had to tell you was that I am not the son of my supposed father, not a Freville at all, and therefore that you"——

"Where did she pick up that nonsense? Why Sir Richard knew your father, and was at Beynham when the news of your birth came there."

"Yes, but I am not his son. Here are the facts: That woman came to me at Beynham—it was in the evening, and I had arrived there early that morning from Paris. She told me that she and the landlady of the White Hart at Lyneham had been the two nurses sent home with the child to take him to Beynham, that the child was taken ill and died at Alassio, and that they, for fear of being charged with neglect or worse, brought another child to Beynham instead. I didn't believe her story, for her manner was not satisfactory; so I manoeuvred till I got the name and address of the other woman. I went to Lyneham the next morning and saw her. She confirmed the story, and told me other things that I will tell you by and by, and she gave me a packet entrusted to her by the child's mother for his uncle. I took

it with me and gave it to Lord de Freville. He opened it in my presence. There was a letter, with a lock of the child's hair, and there was a miniature of him. The hair was flaxen and the eyes were light blue. There can be no doubt as to the authenticity of both, for the packet was sealed with a seal-ring well known to have belonged to my supposed mother. I have it now, and have had it ever since she died, and my uncle, as I call him from habit and still more from affection, can swear to it. The English nurse had been promised a hundred pounds for bringing the child home safely, as his father was too ill to come ; so that besides losing the chance of that, if she had told of his death, she would have lost two hundred pounds more, the bribe offered her for substituting the other. Why that money was given and by whom, I can't find out. The Italian woman pretends that my father was a prince, and that his second wife wanted to get rid of me ; but she can't tell me anything more, though she has been offered a large sum of money to do so. To make a long story short, both the women came to Beynham and were examined by a lawyer on oath. The evidence was complete."

"I don't care what it is, or what the lawyers think," said Everard. "I don't believe a word of it. The woman stole the seal-ring and the miniature, and got a lock of hair, and trumped up the story with the help of the other woman."

"No, it couldn't be. When I send you the whole evidence, as I will in two or three days, you will see"—

"I don't care what they say. Lawyers are not infallible. I believe my own eyes. You are a Freville—I am certain of that—and you can be no one else than the one you have been supposed to be, for there is no other. What did Lord de Freville say to this wonderful story?"

"He couldn't resist the evidence, and no one could. I ought to have told you that the women gave it unwillingly—for they were afraid of being prosecuted—and he made a will at once, leaving me all that was not entailed, and speaking of me in terms that I don't deserve, but value immensely as coming from one who has been a father to me, and much more than most fathers are. Nothing can exceed his kindness to me. He has been, if possible, kinder since than before."

"I am sure that he would ; but so he ought. I wish you

would send me the evidence as soon as you can. There is a fallacy somewhere, and I am determined to find it out, or get it found out."

"I will ; but I am sure of the fact."

"You can't be. You have only the word of these two women, and their evidence is good for nothing by itself. Look here. The Italian woman had evidently been working out the scheme for a long time, or she wouldn't know, for instance, that I come next, so far off as I am. She must have heard that when she was nursemaid in your father's house. Now what was to prevent her or the other woman buying a miniature, getting a seal made from the impression, opening the packet and putting the miniature inside? They could get the seal made in London in a few days ; and there was no check on their time, travelling slowly as they were, in charge of a small child. Then they kept their plan secret until the time was ripe for its accomplishment—until they knew that you were of age. They knew very well that, when you were of age, you could borrow money to give them, and they were quite sharp enough in their way, to know the peculiar value of the offer to me, as I was, four months ago. It was a profound calculation of that Italian woman's, based on the evil in human nature. Or, even supposing the scheme to have been recently made up, how easy it would be for them to buy a miniature anywhere, or have a copy done from some old one, with the proper colouring. And no doubt, as the nurse was liked and trusted by your father and mother, she would have a letter of your mother's by her, sealed most likely with that very ring. It was easy to take off the impression with plaster of Paris, and get some old paper, and make the ink look faded with a rusty nail—all these things can be done. The Italian woman showed clearly what her scheme was. First she came to me, thinking that, as I should be the gainer, she would get a larger sum of money from me and, of course, be safe from prosecution. It was not till she had failed with me that she went to you. The other woman may be an accomplice, or a dupe, or both with a touch of monomania. I wonder whether she drinks?"

"No. There was no symptom of drinking nor of monomania. She gave her evidence distinctly, and no cross-examination could shake it in the least. Besides, the child

is remembered to have had fair hair and blue eyes."

"Does Lord de Freville remember it?"

"Yes, for he was at Sorrento with his brother when the child was born. He says that he asked when I was brought to Beynham afterwards, how it was that I was so dark, and they told him that it was living in the climate of Southern Italy up to the time I was three years old."

"You have staggered but not convinced me," said Everard. "If God spares my life, I will get to the bottom of this, and if not, others will. I shall take legal advice, and work the thing out, if I have to send agents all over the world about it. Don't you see how important it is?"

"No. All I want is to be the legitimate son of a sufficiently well-born father, and to find out who he is or was. That *is* important—fearfully important to me on account of Elfrida. As for the rest, I see that you are much better fitted than I am to"—

"I deny the fact: but you are a noble-hearted fellow, to feel as you do in such a case as this is. However, it is like you, and what one might have expected. Anyhow, fitted or not fitted, I am now out of the question, as regards the future of this old family, which must die out if you are excluded from the succession. And when I say that, I mean a great deal more, but especially as regards this place, which concerns me most. I mean the uprooting of customs, habits and traditions that belong to past ages and no longer grow. I mean the destruction of all those old ties between class and class, that still exist within this house and property because they have never been broken. I mean the loss of moral support to this mission and the poor Catholics belonging to it. I could enlarge on this very much without exhausting the subject, and put it much more strongly; but I have said enough to show that your exclusion could only be an unmitigated evil. I say 'could be,' for it shall not be. If other people believe in the imposture of that woman who has gone about trying to trade on it, I don't; and were it true, *per impossibile*, you would still be the only man I happen to know whom I could trust to carry on and transmit the traditions of Freville Chase. Your parentage would be a puzzle, but couldn't raise a doubt at your expense in any way. Does Lord de Freville really mean to act on the statement of a common imposter?"

"He can't help it. You will see, when I send you the evidence. By the by, I have a letter from him for you in my bag. I will go and get it."

"Wait a moment. I wish to tell you that, the day after you left Rome, I sent instructions for a will, leaving everything to you. I am going to write now to have you differently described, for fear of mistakes. I have only one request to make, and from my knowledge of you I have reason to be sure that you will feel no difficulty about it, but rather the reverse. It is that you will live here. You see, this is the old family place. They went to Beynham in later days—days that you will not think of now with satisfaction, as regards England and as regards the elder line. You are fond of Freville Chase and so is Elfrida—I think she loves it as much as I do, which is saying a great deal. How much good you may do by living here, and how much harm you might do by living elsewhere, you are capable of knowing, and you know. There is no need for me to say more."

There was not indeed. These few words had compelled Hubert to realise what the opinion of three physicians had failed to make him believe. The blow came upon him now as suddenly as if he had never before been warned of it. He answered without delay or reflection, because there was only one thing to say; but he spoke with effort, and his voice trembled very much.

"You may feel confident," he said, "that I will do as you wish, and do it to the best of my power, because it is your wish, which would be sufficient in itself, and also because I feel about it exactly as you feel in every respect. But, in Heaven's name, do try to live. Try for my sake. You can't imagine what the loss of you would be to me. If I could only make you see it, I am sure that you would try. I owe to you my religion and Elfrida—which means everything. Do one thing more for me: it is all I want besides Elfrida. Try to live."

"I will," said Everard, rising from his chair, "I should have been dead a month ago, if I had not made a fight of it for your sake. But I will go on trying: I will indeed. I must write this letter now. Don't be alarmed at what I have told you. Preparing for a thing doesn't make it happen any sooner. If making a will shortened one's life, there would be very few of them at Doctors Commons, I

think. Have you said anything about this absurd imposture to Sir Richard Dytchley?"

"Yes. I wrote to him and to Elfrida yesterday."

"I am glad of it; but I shall write too my version of the story, either to-day or to-morrow, that Lady Dytchley may know what I mean."

"Don't write yet. You are taking too much out of yourself, after your illness and the journey, and this worrying thing at the end of it."

"I am not going to worry myself about a big bogey that will vanish when one faces it; but I must write to Sir Richard as soon as I can, for otherwise Elfrida will get into difficulties with Lady Dytchley."

"Yes; but unhappily you can't prove who I am. That will be the difficulty."

"It shall not be. Leave me to manage it."

Everard began to write his letter to the lawyer, and Hubert left the room. He found Dr. Ranston reading a newspaper in the hall.

"Is it over?" he said.

"Yes, and well over. It didn't excite him, though it was a very worrying business. I am only afraid of his working too much at it."

"Don't be afraid of that. The more he is taken out of the past the better. I don't care how much he thinks, as long as he doesn't think of one thing. But that can't be shut out. It can only be obscured more or less. You have done a good thing by having brought him something to think of and work out. You can't do more."

"Dr. Ranston," said Hubert, "after all that you have done for him, and for me through him, you ought to know what it is that has brought him to this. Had I remained a little longer in Rome, I should have told you before."

"I do know it," said Dr. Ranston (the main facts at least) "from Sir Richard Dytchley. He came to see us in Paris, and he spoke to me privately. He was in a very excited state, and no wonder. A more wanton waste of a most valuable life I never heard of, nor a worse instance of wrong prevailing over right and the lesser power over the greater by the merely negative force of unscrupulousness. How long do you stay?"

"Only till to-morrow morning. And you?"

"If he is well enough, I must return to my duties in London the day after: but I shall be here again. It is unfortunate that you can't be with him just now. You must ask the priest to see as much of him as he can."

Everard had now finished the letter to his lawyer, and Hubert, returning to the gallery, brought Lord de Freville's to him. It was short, but very warmly expressed with regard to both; and referred Everard to Hubert for a full account of all that had happened. There was a postscript with these words:

"I should very much like to see you; but don't come if it would do you harm. I have one thing more to say, as there is little chance of my seeing you, I am afraid, and it is important. When you were born, my father, who was then alive established in a regular way your claim to the peerage, for fear it should become extinct, as I was five and forty, and not married, and my younger brother had no son then. So you will have no trouble about that. Your father knew it at the time, but he died when you were so young that you may not have heard it. God bless you! Try to get well as soon as you can."

Everard handed the letter to Hubert, and when he had returned it, said with a resolute smile:—

"One good turn deserves another. I mean to establish your claim, or rather disestablish the imposture that disputes your right. If I remain as well as I am at present I shall go to Beynham in a day or two; for I feel bound, if possible, to do so on every account. In the meantime I shall let him know by letter what I think about the story, and what I am going to do: you must take it, I will write it now."

He had hardly said the words when his face turned white, with a shadow over it.

"I am afraid—I can't—just now," he said, pausing to take breath painfully. "I don't feel quite well; I shall be all right presently—to-morrow."

Hubert ran into the hall and called Doctor Ranston, who came immediately.

"I knew there would be something of this kind," said he.

"He has done a little too much. We must get him into his room at once."

They carried him into the king's room and laid him on the sofa.

"He must be perfectly quiet for the next four and twenty hours at least," said Doctor Ranston. "He must see no one, talk to no one, not even the priest. He might be seriously thrown back by not being left as he is till he has got over this attack. Knowing what I know, I expected it."

They watched beside him for some time silently. When he appeared to be somewhat better, Hubert took the doctor's arm and, walking to the other end of the room, said in a low voice:—

"What can I do? How can I leave him in this state? I can't go to-morrow morning."

"I hope you will be able to do so," said Doctor Ranston. "I shall know more by and by. Of course these attacks are always to be dreaded; but I don't think there will be any more danger, after it has passed off, than there always is and must be, and will be. But you might make it worse by staying, for it would worry him to know that you were here when duty calls you to be with Lord de Freville."

"I see. There is one more thing I have to ask. He talked of going to Beynham if he was well enough; but I can't think it can be safe at present."

"Certainly not. He must not do so on any account. When the weather is warmer, he may get on horseback and ride about quietly; but he will not be in a fit state, yet a while, even for that. As for going to Beynham, or travelling at all, it is not to be thought of at present. I have brought him home so soon at the greatest risk, and I wouldn't have attempted it if I had not seen that he was becoming dangerously anxious to be at home. I have succeeded so far as to get him here; but you see what a severe attack the exertion of travelling has brought on, in spite of all my precautions. I trust, as I have said, that there will be no increase of danger. But danger there is, must be, will always be, and the least want of caution at any time might prove fatal. I don't wish to alarm you unnecessarily, but I am obliged to tell you the whole truth, so that you may know how to act when you come again. But look there—he is beckoning to you."

Hubert went up to the sofa and bent over to listen.

"You will go to-morrow morning, I hope," said Everard in a very faint voice.

"Yes—be sure that I will."

"And tell him what I was going to write."

"Exactly as you told me,"

"And tell him what I think about that story, and what I mean to do about it."

"Every word. You may feel satisfied that I will convey the meaning of your letter just as if you had written it."

"Thank you. And about my will."

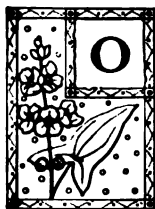
"Yes. I will tell him everything you have said to me to-day."

"Thank you. I wish to see Father Merivale. Please, go for him."

Hubert moved away towards the door, and turning to the doctor said: "What am I to do now after what you told me?"

"Go," said Dr. Ranston. "I see it won't do to interfere with him about that."

CHAPTER XXXI.



VID was of opinion that we are slow to believe what is painful:—

Tarde, quæ credita ledunt, credimus—

and Dr. Ranston, who had not forgotten his classics, thought of the passage when he found that Hubert was again inclined to believe in Everard's recovery.

"I only wish I could believe it myself," thought the doctor, as the carriage drove away with Hubert and his bag early in the morning.

Everard was much better, and could do anything that could be done while lying down. Between ten and eleven o'clock, he said:—

"I think I could sit up. I want to write an important letter to Sir Richard Dytchley.

"Yes, but don't," said the doctor. "Give me till to-morrow morning. Stay on the sofa as you are for to-day: you will find the advantage of it. Here are some letters that came by the post. I wouldn't let them be brought to you before, for quiet is so imperatively necessary."

Everard began to read his letters, and Sir Richard was doing the same thing at the same time in Paris: but the effect was not the same. Everard, having read his, laid them down languidly without any sign of interest.

Sir Richard chose one out of several, read a few lines, and rising uneasily from the breakfast table, betook himself to the window.

"What is the matter," said Lady Dytechley, "and what is the matter with *you*, Elfrida? There is something wrong I see, though you try to hide it."

Sir Richard looked ruefully at the Rue de Rivoli, and wished there were a ladder to descend by. Lady Dytechley pursued him. Elfrida profitted by the pursuit and disappeared.

"Now what is it? I must know," said Lady Dytechley.

"There's nothing pleasant for you to know, and not likely to be," answered Sir Richard in a testy voice.

"And why not, pray? Ida hasn't made such a *very* bad marriage; and Everard is getting over it, as Mr. Exmore did, who was *much* more in love with her; and Elfrida's marriage is, I am sure, all that could be wished, as you have said yourself over and over again."

"I know that—and I'll take good care that nothing comes between them. But perhaps you won't like it so much when you have read this. Here it is in black and white."

She took the letter and, holding it close, began to read it with dilated eyes.

"Go on," muttered Sir Richard, who having got over the first inclination to run away, was seized with a strange wish to provoke hostilities. "Go on," he repeated, standing in front of her, and emitting sounds of grim hilarity. "Go on!"

She did go on, for her interest in the letter was too great to be taken off by the exasperating sounds and postures that symbolised Sir Richard's desire to speak his mind. She read it half through, and then her face reddened, then crimsoned, and then—but the sentence must be left unfinished, for want of an appropriate verb.

"What can this mean?" she gasped. "It must be—it must be a practical joke, of somebody, out of spite."

"It's practical enough," said Sir Richard, "but there's no joke in it, I can tell you. Read away."

"Not if you keep jumping about like that. Do go further off. What's come to you?"

He retired a few paces, and then she finished the letter.

"Well?" said he.

She heaved a heavy sigh, and looked in blank amazement at nothing.

"Well?" he repeated, drawing near her again.

"Very, very shocking!" said she. "Such a dreadful blow to us all. Who could ever have dreamt of this? Poor dear Elfrida! Such a dreadful kind of disappointment!"

"What, Beynham and the peerage, eh?"

"For shame, to accuse me of that!"

"Well, I can't see any other disappointment in it. *He* hasn't disappointed her in any way that I know of.

"But you could never dream of letting her marry a man without a name?"

"Name, or no name, I don't care," said Sir Richard, taking back the letter and pocketing it. "He is as good a fellow as can be, and she likes him, and there it is."

Lady Dytchley felt, like the Marquis Moncalvo, that she must:

Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n.

"I am very, very sorry for it," she said: "of course I am. Do you suppose that nobody but yourself feels anything? It's a dreadful, dreadful blow; and I would have done anything to save poor dear Elfrida from it—which is more than you would have done, or you wouldn't have gone riding off all day, when you might have saved everything, and saved Everard and all the misery and disgrace you have brought upon us, instead of being a support to me, who was so ill, and might have been saved from having to go abroad, which brought everything upon us, if you had only had the heart to take the trouble, instead of deserting me and—Oh! you really ought to be ashamed of it. And now you try to make black white, just to screen yourself, just because you know that, if it hadn't been for Everard's troubles, that were all your fault, as I have shown, *he* wouldn't have been so much

at Freville Chase, and wouldn't have been engaged to Elfrida, and all this wouldn't have happened."

"What's all this about?" said Sir Richard. "You kept on making a row all day, and swore that old Chlorodyne would have you go abroad. I wish I had stood it out; but I didn't, and there it is, and I shall never forgive myself. You said just now that Everard had got over it. I only wish you had seen him since, as I have, and heard what the doctor said. And now because you know from this letter that he must be Lord de Freville, you are sorry for what you have done, and try to lay it all on me. I have been weak and a great fool, and all because I neglected my religion; but you never rested till you had done all the mischief. And you *have* done it. You had lived long enough to know at least what Everard's position was worth, as a Freville of Freville Chase; but you wouldn't listen to anything. And now Ida is miserable for life, and Everard, the only son of the dearest friend I ever had, is dying slowly, and the whole race will be extinct. If you had acted honestly, Ida would now be living in peace and happiness at Freville Chase, and all the old property of the Freville's would centre in Everard, with the old peerage into the bargain. You have lost all this, and lowered yourself in the opinion of all your friends. And for what? On the wild goose-chase of trying to make Ida break faith with Everard. And you did this, knowing that she was devoted to him. You went on at it after she had indignantly refused Exmore. You went on it to the last, playing into the hands of that scoundrel Moncalvo, till the poor child didn't know what she was doing. And what, if it had answered? What, if you had succeeded in so corrupting her heart that she could have been capable of such a cold-blooded breach of faith to such a man as Everard, when she had been engaged to him all her life? What would you have really gained, even as things were then? What have *you* got by it yourself? You have made yourself a by-word to all your friends, and the one you made up to about it won't speak to you in your own county. See if she does! The very one you made up to! There never was such"——

An inarticulate but rather loud protest from Lady Dytechley brought his speech to a close.

"I didn't make up to her" she said. "It's a wicked

story. She made up to me all along about it, and was *most anxious* for the match, It's very heartless and cruel and unjust and unmanly of you, to put everything on me just because Everard didn't get Ida's letter in time. And what has all this to do with the unfortunate young man who was put out of his proper position by a nurserymaid palming him off as Lord de Freville's nephew?"

"'Proper position?' You can't have read his letter through."

"Of course I read it through. But you don't mean to say that you believe the woman's account of his birth? Why, can't you see on the face of it who he is—some relation of hers or of the Italian housemaid she talks of. Can't you see why she palmed him off as the child they were bringing to Beynham? And can't you see that she would, of course, make him out to be the son of some great person to screen herself and set Lord de Freville looking about for the father, and to make him give her money on the strength of it, instead of prosecuting her for conspiracy?"

"I don't believe he's anything of the sort; but whatever he is, Elfrida shall not be interfered with. It's enough to have made Ida marry a man she hates, and murdered Everard who she was devoted to, and snuffed out the whole line of the Freville's, without ruining Hubert (whose praises you were always singing till this moment) and knocking the bloom off Elfrida's young life. I know it was my fault at the beginning, and I know why it was. I shall be glad to tell you why another time, for it may be of use to you, if you will listen; but I can't have any more mischief done through my fault. I don't care for anybody. Elfrida shall marry him, if he's the son of a chimney-sweep. And I won't stand any delays and doctors and sparks flying upward. I told him in my last letter that they had better wait till the autumn; but I declare now I won't let them wait more than three months for anybody or anything. Whoever is at it, or not at it, it shan't be put off beyond that. I shall write and tell him so now, directly, and put the letter in the post myself."

Having thus unburdened his mind and his conscience of an intolerable load, which had been accumulating for many years, he turned on his heel and walked away.

"Oh! but do stop a moment," said Lady Dytechley,

running after him in hot haste. "Only think what you are committing yourself to!"

"I *have* thought," said he, opening the door just wide enough to let himself out, "I have done nothing but think."

"But you *must* see"——

"I see what I ought to do, and must do, and will do; and there is an end of it."

The door closed behind him, and Lady Dytechley remained standing inside, staring into space.

Sir Richard went to Elfrida's room, knocked at the door, and pushing it half open, looked in, saying:—

"Never mind. You shall marry him, all the same. I don't care for anybody."

He then wrote a letter to Hubert in the same sense, and walked forth into the Rue di Rivoli, saying to himself:—

"I shouldn't wonder at all, now, if that red-whiskered fellow were at the bottom of it. He's always blundering and getting somebody into trouble."

CHAPTER XXXII.



EVERARD became so much better after his last attack, that in three days Dr. Ranston left Freville Chase, intending to return from time to time for a few hours. Hubert had not forwarded a copy of the evidence, the original being still in the hands of the lawyers.

Everard waited a few days, and then wrote to the head of the firm as follows:—

"Dear Sir,—

"As I am personally interested in the inquiry now going on about the succession to Beynham and the Barony of De Freville, I think that I am entitled to see the evidence which has been brought forward on the subject. My real motives however are:—that I disbelieve the statement, that I have a strong objection to being made into a wrongful heir, no less

volens, that I have every possible reason for wishing to prevent such a result in this case, and that I am determined to unravel a conspiracy of whose existence I have no doubt whatever. By sending me a copy of the documents you will oblige me very much, help the cause of justice, and, moreover save the family from extinction, as my life is not worth a days purchase. Of course I shall defray the cost of the copying and any other expenses connected with it. I am, dear sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"Everard Freville."

Whilst he was directing this letter two people were arriving in a fly from Lyneham. One was the landlady of the White Hart, whom he had summoned by a strongly worded note, the other was old Susan. When they entered the room the landlady hung back and Susan, making a decisive curtsy, opened the case in these words:—

"Please, squire, she were that frightened at coming as she sent for me to come along with her, 'because,' says she, 'I knows he'll take the law of me and give a warrant, in course, as he's a magistrate.' But I hopes you'll look over it, sir, for you see she were took in, she were and had to do with what they call a transaction; which Mrs. Atherstone (that's my missis ever since I were a bit of a girl) told me particular not to get into a transaction, as always leads to some unpleasantness, as were how all this trouble come on my poor niece, Eliza—that's her as keeps the White Hart, only she's that frightened, she can't say nothing for herself. But if you'll believe me, squire—you knows Mrs. Atherstone, and she'll tell you I wouldn't tell no lies—she didn't mean no harm, but were let in, as I were a-saying, by that nasty deceitful thing as lugged her into a transaction. And it's my belief, squire, as that man were at the bottom of it—him as come to the White Hart, a-pretending to be a foreigner, and went prowling about at the Four Ways, and would have broke into the house, only I took and fetched the blunderbuss—I ain't afraid of firearms which my father lived under-keeper at Hazeley—and he made off pretty quick. And if Muggles (that's the p'liceman) had took him up when I told him what the man was, we shouldn't have had this good-for-nothing creature a-coming with a story as no one can't make out. And you may depend on it them two were in league

together. Muggles kep' all on a-saying he hadn't no charge to make again him ; but what's the good of the law (no offence, I hope, squire), if a vagabond like that is to be let go about, getting respectable people into trouble, and sending that other woman as my missis picked up off the door-step, as no doubt was in league with him, like the foreigneering one, to take in Mrs. Atherstone as kep' her for months in the house, and then she made off the day that chap came prowling about. When I was young they'd have took and clapped him into the stocks, and he wouldn't have come about no more, He'd have broke into the house if I hadn't fetched the blunderbuss ; and if Muggles had took him up, we should have been shut of him ; but I couldn't get nothing done, and the fellow, in course, he was very spiteful about it, and so they, he and the women (that's the foreigneering one and her as called herself Jane Davis) brought out a old transaction and lugged poor Eliza into this mess. But if you'll believe me, Squire, she couldn't have meant nothing. She were a very good child always, and particlar industrious, and did as she were bid. I think sir, if it ain't taking a liberty, as you might be able to set a trap for the varmint and catch 'em in it, which they're no better nor varmint, and not so good neither, for it ain't their nature to go poaching about, and they knows better, and so, as I were a-saying "——

"Very true," said Everard. "Sit down, if you please, and let me hear the rights of it, that I may see if I can help you in any way. I don't quite understand what it is that you want me to do."

This last remark was addressed to the landlady ; but old Susan had come there to speak for her niece, and she meant to do it.

"Please sir," she said, "the poor thing is that put about as she don't know whether she's a-standing on her head or her heels. You see sir, when she was in foreign parts, a-bringing home "——

"I have heard all that. What I want to know is, how *you*" (here he fixed his eyes on the landlady) "heard that I was the next heir. I am a long way off. How did you know that there was no one between ?"

"Well, sir," said the landlady, "it wasn't my knowing it that brought about all this trouble. It was that Italian

nursery-maid that took advantage of knowing it, and kept it back because she should be able, as she thought, to get money from one side or the other. But we both heard of it at the same time."

"Thank you. I should be glad to know how and when."

"It was one evening sir, at supper. Mr. Freville's man came down, and said the talk at dinner had been about a letter from my lord, telling how he had just made it right and square before the House of Lords, and established the claim of the child at Freville Chase,—that was you, sir, to be the heir, and how he had begun five years before, when you was born, and the lawyers and them had been all that time about it, and he was so glad he had done it, whereby he had been afraid that the title would come to be extinct. And Mr. Freville and his friends laughed about it, to think how pleased his father (that was my lord then), would be to hear of the fine baby that was just born—which was Mr. Freville's only son, he that died and was the cause (poor little innocent) of all this dreadful business. And then Mr. Freville's man said it was a good thing, for they was all black Papists (begging your pardon, sir) at Freville Chase. 'What's that?' I said, for I didn't know what he meant."

"You'll please to excuse her ignorance, as didn't know no better, squire," interrupted Susan, "I were every bit as bad as that, only"—

"Let me go on with it, aunt, now I have begun. Well, sir, he said they was black Papists—that's what he said, 'What's that?' said I. 'Why,' said he, 'they take their daughters and shut them up and torture them; and the gratings that look like coal-cellars are air-holes for them to breathe through, where they put them, and they wall them up alive if ever they try to get out. 'Lord o' mercy!' I said, 'It's a blessing there's only a boy at Freville Chase!' That was what we said. Well, sir, that wicked woman it was that did all the mischief. She was taken to wait on me in the nursery—we were in a villa at Sorrento—and was regular nursery-maid under me when the dear child was older. Then, three years afterwards, when she and I was taking him to England and he died on the way, she said to me, 'You'll be hanged for murder as sure as possible, because they'll all say the people at Freville Chase bribed you to make away with him, who you know are worse than brute beasts with

their children and have no regard to human life—this is what she said, sir, grinning all the time. But, of course, I know better now, sir, and humbly beg your pardon I am sure, for repeating such things.”

“Well—what did you do in consequence?”

“Well, sir, what could I do, alone among foreigners, as you may say, who didn’t even know their own language when I spoke to them in it, and at her mercy who I knew would swear black was white when we got back to my lord. So then, when she brought the baby, a very beautiful child, I must say”——

“Thank you,” said Everard. “I know the rest. Was the child who died dark or fair?”

“Fair sir, like his mother. He had blue eyes and flaxen curls.”

“Are you quite sure about the eyes? Blue eyes in a young child, if they are not light blue, often become very dark afterwards.”

“They were light blue sir. I can swear to that.”

“When did you get the miniature copied?” said Everard suddenly, looking through her with an expression that said, “I know you did have it copied. You had better tell the truth.”

The landlady looked surprised, but answered quietly. “There was no copy taken, sir, that ever I heard of.”

“I can make nothing out of her,” thought Everard. “The other woman, who has a much stronger character, must have mesmerised her, or got the upper hand somehow”——“Can you tell me?” he said, “where the Italian woman is?”

“Not just now, sir. She went off after she was examined by the lawyers. But she’s coming back to see them again, because Mr. Hubert got my lord to promise her something for her trouble—in fact he gave her something for what she has done, though it was all against him.”

“When she comes again it will be worth your while to send her and worth her while to come. Do you know who was the father of the child that you tell me was put in the place of Lord de Freville’s nephew, who, as you say, died in Italy, on his way from Sorrento to Beynham?”

“No, sir. I questioned that woman over and over again about it; but she only blubbered and howled, and took on like a mad thing. I believe she would be glad to tell, if she

knew. It's my belief she overreached herself and was taken in about it. But I should have said she is gone off to Italy on purpose to try and find out who the parents of the child were. Mr. Hubert told her it would be for her good to do that ; and she's gone to do what she can. She'll be sure to come bothering to me when she comes back, and I'll let you know, sir, directly, and send her here."

Everard again thanked them both and delivered them over to the hospitality of Mrs. Roland, with a caution to keep their mouths closed, except for gastronomic purposes, as long as any one besides herself was within earshot.

"I don't believe it any more than I did," he thought, "not a bit. I must get hold of the woman who said I was sucking the blood of the peoples. I made a mess of it by being too stiff with her. But what could I have done? I wish I had called in Elfrida. She was right. She saw much further than I could. A sensible woman is always wiser in these things than any man."

He then began to review the whole story by the light (such as it was) that the landlady of the White Hart had thrown on it, and he summed up thus :—

"It must be that the woman is too lymphatic to stand against the influence of a strong will. The other has, as it were, electro-biologised her into believing the story, by threatening to tell it without, on her own account, and get her into trouble. The lymphatic woman would be frightened out of her wits by that ; for she would have no witness to disprove it at this distance of time, and it would never occur to her that the *onus probandi* must rest with the person on whose unsupported evidence it depended. That must have been it. The landlady is just the sort of person to be a helpless tool. The longer it was delayed the more frightened she would be, and the more confused, after having been worked upon continually, year after year. Hubert is a Freville, I am sure of that—whatever people may say about accidental likenesses. The more I look at him and watch him, the more convinced I am of it ; and therefore he must be the one he has been supposed to be, there being no other. I must get hold of the other woman, who is sharp enough to know her own interest. The worst of it is that I shall have to wait for her, and, in the meantime, all sorts of complications "—

The door opened, and Hubert walked in. Everard looked up and read the purport of his arrival in his face.

"I see what you have come to tell," he said. "You have brought me bad news indeed, bad in every way, except as regards himself. But tell me how and when it was."

"He died this morning," said Hubert. "I have lost one who has been to me as a father. I come to announce it and to give you a message from him. He died suddenly at last, only an hour after receiving holy communion. It was his wish to be buried here, in the little Catholic cemetery. He said, with the simplicity of a child, that he should feel more at home at Freville Chase where the Frevilles had kept the faith, particularly as you were the means of his getting it at last. That was the first part of his message. His next request was that you should take the title and property at once, because any hesitation about it would only attract notice to what will otherwise be soon forgotten. He told me to say that the conclusion from the evidence was unavoidable, so that he had been compelled to accept it. Moreover he charged me to see that his wishes in your regard are carried out at once. His third request was that you would build a Catholic church at Beynham as soon as possible; and he wanted you to have it built in your own way, because he believed in your taste and knowledge."

"I am afraid he thought more of me than I deserve," said Everard. "But his last wishes will, of course, be law to me, except as regards believing in that ridiculous evidence. I wonder the lawyers didn't see through it; but I suppose they go by certain general rules, that are right on the average, though not applicable to such an exceptional case as this. I have just seen the landlady of the White Hart, and though she gave her evidence in a manner that would have convinced nine people out of ten, I am not convinced. No sophistry or imposture of any kind whatever can succeed in convincing me that you are not a Freville. Meanwhile, as I can't avoid assuming a false position, I must take its duties under protest. But I am interrupting you."

"No. That was all. But I was going to say that I have had a very kind letter from Sir Richard. I find you wrote to him. Do you happen to know whether I should find Father Merivale at home just now?"

"I don't think you would: but he is coming to dinner."

"That will do. The fact is, I want to be received into the Church, if possible, before I leave here to-morrow. I had some instructions from the priest who has been at Beynham most of the time lately ; but he said that I was all right, owing to the books you gave me, which I had worked at pretty well. So I want to ask if I can be received before Mass to-morrow morning."

"I don't think there can be any difficulty about that ; but we may as well go and ask how soon he is likely to be back. I can go there with you, and a little way outside the gate-house. Ranston told me I could walk on the terrace before he left, and I feel the better for it. I am to ride, soon."

"Not Thunderbolt"——

"Poor Thunderbolt!" said Everard in a dreamy voice, as if he were speaking of things far off. "That ride to Lyneham broke his heart. The pace was too sudden and I pressed him too much. He went gallantly, but the last fence finished him. I knew it had by the feel of him. He fell dead in his box a few days afterwards. We broke down together."

A shadow came over his face as he spoke, and his eyes looked wearily out of the western bay window at the hills purpled by the setting sun, behind Bramscote where Ida had told him how happy she was in him and through him, and where he had seen her as for the last time.

Hubert feeling horribly tempted to wish that he had another chance at the Marquis Moncalvo, turned aside to smother an emphatic word that was forcing its way between his teeth. Everard rose from his chair and said :

"Come, I long for some fresh air. And I wanted to say something about the church at Beynham. You must bring me a sketch of the exact position of the ground, for as you know, I can't go there yet, and the general effect of a building is more dependent on its position than people are now aware of. It should look as if it grew out of the landscape and completed it, not as if some body had pitched it there hap-hazard, because he had taken a fancy to it somewhere else. People choose what they call a model, or set somebody to compose one, without any reference to relative position, landscape, atmosphere, sunlight, climate, or height of ground. The design may be good in itself, but being carried out in the wrong place, *conclusio sequitur debiliorem*

partem. There is no end to the money wasted and the good work spoilt by putting things in the wrong place. Hardly any one seems able in these days to understand, still less to foresee, either the relations between the style of a thing and the surroundings, or the effect of the parts on the whole. They get one man to design a church, another to decorate the inside—on no plan at all and irrespective of the architect's idea—a pious lady to present a statue from Munich, and another pious lady to cover the pedestal on feast days with bits of blue silk or satin that look like one of her old petticoats."

"I have seen a specimen of the kind at Otterbury," said Hubert, "where you went to Mass when you were at Beynham."

"That isn't quite what I mean. That little church, which has the appearance of a cast-off schoolroom, is very poor, like the congregation, and tells its own tale. There is a certain pathos in the poor little attempts to relieve its bareness. But I do protest against cramming a church with expensive rubbish, and being satisfied with gross violations of the commonest good taste, such as would not be tolerated in a drawing-room. Catholics in England are too few, too poor, and too overwhelmed by claims of all kinds, to do anything worth speaking of in the way of church building. We can only point to the Cathedrals and the ruined Abbeys and the old parish churches, and say *Fuimus Troes*. But we are not obliged to ignore the commonest principles of good taste and distract or impede devotion by making hideous contrasts of shape and colour, and insist on putting up statues that suggest the idea of a hairdresser's window, and then dress them out in odds and ends of muslin and tinsel, like dolls at a fancy bazaar. I have often been stared at as a heathen and a publican for not admiring these atrocities, and had it implied, more or less broadly, that I was wanting in devotion. I astonished a pious lady once about the bedizened statues by quoting St. John of the Cross, where he speaks of '*people who adorn the sacred images with those garments which a frivolous race daily invents*,' and I showed her the passage in his works; but she only said she wasn't clever enough to understand him, and wouldn't presume, &c. . . . So there it ended—and here we are at Father Merivale's door. And there he is,

but with somebody. If we walk about for a few minutes the coast will be clear. I was going to say that I have high authority enough for disliking bad taste and frippery in churches. Look at the devotional dignity of St. Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham. I defy you to find a bit of bad or doubtful taste in it. Go into the Dominican Church at Stone, built by that holy and in every respect wonderful woman, Mother Margaret. Go there some day, and, if I am alive, tell me your impressions of it. She never would tolerate frippery or any kind of bad taste."

"I can well imagine that:" said Hubert. "A separation of the good and the beautiful is a kind of divorce. I don't mean to compare it with that which Moses permitted '*because of the hardness of men's hearts*;' but it certainly shows a want of something that ought to be. How do you account for the artistic theories of these pious people?"

"I don't think they have any. They go by rule of thumb—implying the blunderbuss principle, that out of many scattered shots one or two ought to hit in the dark."

"How comes it that so many people are satisfied with the results, when Catholic traditions of art point exactly the other way?"

"It comes down from the later days of persecution, when Catholics in England were just beginning to build wretched little chapels by sufferance. They were obliged to make them look like stables or tool-houses, and were contented with bare walls inside; for it was unsafe to attract attention. So deep was their impression of this necessity, that the precaution outlasted the need. There are many people now living who remember the time when there wasn't a statue of our Blessed Lady to be found in any one of them. By and by they began to do something; but the old traditions had been taken from them, and what they could afford to do was shockingly bad, of course—mahogany and tinsel. They couldn't help that. Then there came an influx of converts. They did good in many ways, and all the ways led towards a revival of taste. First of all, they had not inherited the habit of taking it for granted that they were aliens in their native land. That in itself was something to begin with; for no one who has not tried the other position can imagine what a cold shade it casts around one, even now, when things have changed a good deal in fact and more in

appearance. They infused new blood and fresh enthusiasm and a readiness for warfare both offensive and defensive. Their influence helped a good deal to stir people up in many ways ; and as there was then a strong revival of Gothic art, with Pugin at its head, everything looked well in that direction. But the Catholic movement (as the phrase goes) relaxed, Pugin died, schools and poor missions multiplied their claims, and revived mediævalism went where the wealth of the country was. So far it could not be helped. You can't do great works on a grand scale unless the purse and the feeling of the nation is with you. But what we do we can at least try to do well. We needn't strain our resources in cultivating bad taste and making pretentious incongruities, when a little more thought and a little less self-confidence would help us to something good of its kind at less cost. Suppose an artist were painting a picture for you. What would anyone say, if you insisted on spoiling the composition by setting somebody else to paint the background and two or three others to do some irrelevant figures out of drawing? Yet people often do the same thing in principle. They decorate a church without regard to the style of the building or the intention of the architect, add anything that somebody will pay for, and think one has no devotion if one doesn't admire it."

"It seems to me that you are letting off the converts rather too easily," said Hubert, as they passed the gatehouse and turned into the Chase. "What was the use of them if they couldn't make a row about church art, when they came in fresh—unfettered by traditional repression, and had Pugin to teach them the right principles."

"And by the same token," said Everard, "they were likely to fall into the idea that it was a test of orthodoxy to go in for what was most conspicuous. Converts are no worse in taste, on the average, than the rest, and no better. The cause lies partly in the disheartening disproportion between wants and means, partly in the modern idea that everyone can judge everything *stans pede in uno*. We know what humility means in a spiritual sense, but we are too much in a hurry now to apply it in things that have no apparent connection with the confessional—in things that don't make a direct appeal to the conscience. Humility shows us our own deficiencies, and makes us look upwards

with critical reverence to the highest models. That it sharpens perception in spiritual matters, every Catholic knows who knows anything ; and as the spiritual is the true foundation of the intellectual and the artistic, the same cause will produce the same effect in the one case as in the other. But the difference is, that outside the spiritual we don't see so clearly either the bearings of things or our own motives. No kind of self-deception comes more readily to hand than that of depreciating one's own judgment while one is really searching no higher. We shall all, or at anyrate most of us, find it somewhere in ourselves. And now the obvious retort is, ' What are *you* going to do, after criticising others ? ' I can only answer that I feel very small and hope to do my best. I have gone on from one thing to another, having been set off by the responsibility of building a church by command of the Dead, and I have run one thing into the other without much connection. We can work out what I mean some of these days, and make something of it perhaps. But here is the man you want, close upon us. Father Merivale ; you are wanted on urgent private business, and so I will be off."

CHAPTER XXXIII.



SIX days afterwards the mortal remains of the fourteenth Lord de Freville were brought to Freville Chase and buried in the cemetery behind the grove of walnut trees on the south-west of the house. Dr. Ranston had arrived the evening before to see Everard, and six priests came in the morning to sing the requiem. In the afternoon, when the last of them had gone away, Dr. Ranston, who was walking on the terrace with Everard, began to be enthusiastic about the requiem and Father Merivale's brief address.

"It was extraordinarily impressive," he said. "But I think we had better go in. You have had no rest all day."

Hubert, who had speeded the last parting guest on his

way to the station, met them at the entrance and they went into the gallery.

"Yes, it was wonderfully impressive," said the doctor, seating himself and turning over a few leaves of the nearest book. "That old plain chant was a poem in music—a grand and wonderful poem, that suggested even more than it expressed and took one back to the days of Tintern and Croyland. Father Merivale said just what one felt to be the right thing in the right place. His words were solemn without sadness, comforting without the spiritual optimism that turns an ordinary sinner into a saint by the mere fact of his having died. Your priests know how far they may go ; and that gives them a freedom of thought such as I see nowhere else. Religiously minded Protestants go to work stiffly, as if they were pinioned. The broad school has no restraint at all. I find order and freedom united in the Catholic Church, and nowhere else."

"Yes ; and there's a lot more that you won't find anywhere else, nor anything like it," said Hubert. "There's the truth, whole and entire. That's why priests have the freedom you speak of. A man may break down fences, as you say, and cut about the country like a colt that has got out of the stable ; but he isn't really free in his movements unless he is sure of his ground. He must either shy at this thing or that, or get into bogs or rabbit holes. I saw that ; so I looked out for a safe lead, and now I know where I am."

"There is a great deal in what you say," answered Dr. Ranston, "and if I could be as sure of a lead as you think you are, I should follow it. But I can't find it. You are fortunate in feeling sure that you have."

"Not if it isn't the right one."

"Well, even then. A happy dream is a subjective reality while it lasts. I was not aware that you had become a Catholic. I heard that Lord de Freville had."

"Yes. I am going to make my first communion to-morrow in this chapel. Less than six months ago I believed like you, that one can be an honorary member of the Catholic Church."

"My dear enthusiastic young friend," said the doctor in a tone of strongly repressed irritation, "I never said nor supposed anything of the kind."

"And yet it comes to that, if you think of it," said

Hubert, with a good-humoured simplicity that was irresistible. "You admire the beauty that you see in the Catholic Church: you reverence the holiness of her principles: you look up to the heroic that you find in her teaching and in the lives of her saints, and in the life of one who, living in the world, with every trial and temptation that the world could set before him, has done things that astonished your mind and made you wonder how they could have been done. While under that impression you saw the last sacraments administered to him in Rome, and to-day you were present at the Requiem Mass. You spoke more enthusiastically of both than I ever heard a Catholic speak, and yet you tell me that the thing which makes both what they are is only a comfortable sort of dream, better than being bothered when one is awake. If that isn't trying to be an honorary member of the Catholic Church, I don't know what is. An honorary member of a club doesn't pay, and hasn't any responsibilities; and an æsthetic admirer of Catholicity thinks he has nothing to do but to enjoy what pleases him in it, without going to confession—which human nature, as such, isn't inclined to like—or binding himself to obey anything beyond his own private appreciation of what is agreeable to him. The only difference between the two is, that it can't be done in the Church. I am afraid you think me an impudent fellow and self-sufficient for expressing myself in this way to a man so very much above me in experience, and knowledge, and ability, and everything else; but nothing could have been further from my intention than that, or more against my principles, and more particularly and for every reason as regards yourself. In a question of religion one must speak openly or not at all; and I couldn't have done so without putting the case as I did, for I could see it in no other light."

"I like your way of putting it," said Dr. Ranston. "I was a little startled at the picture, seeing it for the first time in that light; but I must say that I find it a faithful one. I acknowledge myself as a would-be honorary member, ignored of course as such, but unable to wish for more. I can't believe in the Catholic Church because—but I have no right to ventilate my disbelief before two fervent Catholics."

"Don't mind about that," said Hubert. "The draught

won't hurt us. But I must leave you to Everard, for I find it's a good deal past four o'clock now, and I promised to take a message for Father Merivale to an old man at Chase End this afternoon. So I must be off, or I shall not have time to do it."

"Well, then," said Dr. Ranston, when Hubert had left the room. "This is why I cannot believe in the Catholic Church:—I find it too complete for a world that is incomplete essentially, too perfect for a state of things in which perfection is unattainable, too uncomprising to be reconciled with the idea of human society, which, but for habitual compromise, would fall into chaos. In a word it claims to be incorruptible where every living thing has the seeds of corruption in it."

"I think you will find some weak points there," said Everard. "If she were not complete and perfect in principle, how could she be the work of God? If she were not uncompromising in doctrine, how could she claim to be the teacher of truth, which is necessarily exclusive? If she were not incorruptible, how could she be for all time? St. Ignatius, who lived in the second century, says in one of his epistles (to the Ephesians, I think), '*For this cause did the Lord take the ointment on His head, that he might breathe incorruption upon the Church.*' The attributes you speak of, instead of being a reasonable cause for doubting her divine origin, would lead one to infer the contrary. Of course I don't expect you to infer it as a fact; for if you did, you would be obliged to accept the consequences, which you are not prepared to do. But, at any rate, you must see that, whatever the inference may be worth in your opinion, it proves against you, if it proves anything."

"I see that I have no chance against you," said Dr. Ranston with a self-depreciatory smile. It was the smile of a man who feeling that his cause is not equal to his powers of mind, unconsciously tries to maintain the dignity of both by exaggerating his adversary's means of defence on the point in question. Everard saw the smile, its meaning, its tendency, and said:—

"Did you notice the sunset to day? I never saw a finer one."

"Yes, I did," answered the doctor. "But why do you turn the conversation?"

"Because I thought it was leading nowhere."

"You think there is no earnestness in me, then?"

"How could I think so, after all that I have seen of you, and all that you have done for me? You are full of earnestness, but, in the matter of religion, it boils over and goes off in steam."

"I know it does. And my feeling of what your cousin, Mr. Freville, calls honorary membership is the safety valve that keeps the boiler from bursting. Without it I should have no faith at all."

"I don't see how you can be said to have any even in the loosest sense; for faith is necessarily definite, and your belief is not."

"As definite as yours, only broader."

"Is the true course of a stream broader because it overflows, or definite because its banks are broken in? My dear friend, this is leading nowhere."

"Nowhere? You have made a curious philosophical discovery."

"Well, to be more correct, it doesn't lead anywhere. It must go or tumble somewhere, of course, but only into a quagmire, or a labyrinth without a clue."

"Why? My theory may be false, but the idea is intelligible, and may be worked out."

"I don't know how, for you start with an impossibility."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, you have what are called 'Catholic sympathies?'"

"Yes, that is just what I have."

"With it as a whole—doctrine, principles, and ritual, or only with candlesticks, and thuribles, and plain chant?"

"As a whole; I can't separate the two in my mind, any more than I can separate the tracery of a Gothic arch from the arch itself."

"Very well, then. As your sympathies are with the whole, so they are with its parts, and therefore with its doctrine, which is the principal part—the arch out of which the tracery comes. But Catholic doctrine is in direct contradiction to Protestant doctrine, which you profess. Now the possibility of being true is the least claim that a doctrine can have to the sympathy of any one, for no sane person would care about a doctrine that he knew to be false. Therefore you must believe that Catholic doctrine may possibly be

true ; and as you also believe that Protestant doctrine is true, it follows that two contradictories may both be true, which is impossible. Therefore you start from an impossibility."

"We are at cross purposes. To me it isn't a question of which is certainly true, but which is the most probable ; and the Catholic faith is, to my mind, the least probable of the two, though far more attractive."

"Yes ; but that only amounts to being of opinion that the one is less likely to be false than the other. What can you work out from that ? Both propositions are negative. Out of negative premises you can't conclude anything."

"When I said 'the least probable,' I meant to say 'certain,' as far as I am capable of feeling certain about it."

"Subjectively true, then ; true in your own belief. That isn't what you said before, by the by, and it changes your position, but without mending it, for Catholicity and Protestantism can't both be even subjectively true, or you would still be believing in two contradictories. Neither can the one that is not so, seem even probable ; for, if it were, the other would not be subjectively true, but only more probable, which is what you said it was at first. Therefore, whether you find Protestantism more probable, as you began by saying, or subjectively true, as you say now, your Catholic sympathies are out of place, and your idea of what Hubert called honorary membership a delusion. The idea is not new. My own limited experience has shown it to be the natural outcome of seeking truth with a reservation, and hero-worshipping the good and the beautiful, till the true, the good, and the beautiful are erected into an impersonal God, a Trinity in the abstract. That is the logical result of it ; for, whatever you may think, you can't be subjectively certain that Protestantism is true, or you would never dream of attributing any probability at all to that which contradicts it. So we come to what you said at first—a question of more or less probability ; and if you follow that out, you will come to an impersonal God—in fact, to 'the Unknown and Unknowable,' which puts a stop to any further knowledge ; and as regards the question you started, leads nowhere—which is just what I began by saying."

"I am not up to finding a hole in your argument," said Dr. Ranston, "at anyrate not without cudgelling my brains

and keeping you waiting for the result. Suppose we try a different tack."

"If you wish it," said Everard; "but I think you had better give up the voyage. You are not prepared to undertake it."

"I believe you are right. Suppose, then, we see what I can infer about the whole Catholic faith from a few of its doctrines. The whole is made up of its parts, and if I can go through them all by degrees, I may see at last what the whole is."

"If you wish it to be so, why, so let it be," said Everard. "I know that people *have* found the truth in that way. But it isn't a safe one, unless it leads up to belief in the whole as a whole, and in the parts because they are parts of that whole; for otherwise, if they miss one part at first and don't quite make it out when they find it, they are liable to doubt the authenticity of the whole. However, I don't think it matters in your case. You don't want authenticity: you want information about things that you have not had the means of inquiring into. I can give you very little, for I know much less than you suppose; but what little I can give is at your service, as everything of mine will always be."

"You are always kind and always considerate," said Dr. Ranston. "I feel that I have no right to force these subjects on you, having, as you say, no final cause for doing so. But I have one excuse. I often hear people talk nonsense about Catholic doctrines, and, as I have a great reverence for the Catholic Church, and believe in Macaulay's New Zealander on a broken arch of London Bridge, I should be glad of any information that would help me to turn them over. The first question that occurs to me is that of Transubstantiation. As to its being impossible, which is the common argument against it, the objection is contemptible. Our own food undergoes transubstantiation continually, under the name of assimilation; and as that is possible, being true, it really is too cool of any one, calling himself a Christian, to maintain that God cannot transubstantiate bread and wine into His own body and blood—cannot do at once, by a miracle, what He is always doing gradually by one of His natural laws. The impossibility of multiplying His presence is just as untenable by a Christian, for He who multiplied the loaves and fishes can certainly multiply His

own body. All these objections are absurd—inconsistent with a Christian's belief and knowledge. There is no intellectual difficulty in it. Mine, were I inquiring as a possible convert, would be one of feeling and impression. My difficulty is past reasoning. The stupendous condescension, the sublime humility of the act overwhelms me. It is beyond me : I can't take it in. And as I don't find myself less capable of understanding what comes in my way than other people are, I can't believe that God can have so ordained ; for He never requires from us more than we can do."

"I must remind you," answered Everard, "that the difficulty is not original and not founded on the deficiencies of human understanding. Many of the Jews, after seeing and hearing our Lord, left Him, on account of that doctrine, and said, 'Who can hear it?' A small number of them remained, and St. Peter, speaking in their name, said, when asked if they would do the same, 'Lord, whither shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' If our Lord has the words of eternal life (and we must believe that He has, if we believe the New Testament), surely we had better believe His words than trust to our own attempts at grasping the infinite and exhausting the inexhaustible. Those people were without excuse, for God Himself had spoken to them in bodily presence, as He now speaks to others by His grace ; but there is the same fallacy in your reasoning as in theirs. There are two middle terms, as there are nearly always in the objections raised against Catholic doctrines. But I wish you would talk of something else. The people you want to set right will go on saying the same things, whether you correct them or not ; and you may do harm to yourself. A wall without mortar is easily blown down, but one can't build on the sand. You are not prepared to face all consequences ; and if you should happen to see beyond and turn away from the sight, you will be in the position of those Jews. One thing leads on to another, and if we go on, you may be taken off your legs without having learned to swim."

"Don't be afraid," said Dr. Ranston. "I know what I am about. Where are the two middle terms?"

"They are as distinct as the two funnels of a big steamer. Your major is, that no one can believe what he can't under-

stand ; your minor, that *you* can't understand transubstantiation. But in order to conclude that you therefore cannot believe it, the word 'understand' must have the same meaning in both premises. Now it has not. You can't mean that no one can believe what he doesn't understand *thoroughly* ; or half the world would have to disbelieve the best authenticated facts of every science. Therefore you can only mean, 'understand *to a certain extent*.' But you can't mean that you don't understand transubstantiation to a certain extent, especially after what you have said about it. You can only mean that you don't understand it thoroughly. And so your argument really comes to this :—'No one can believe what he can't understand to a certain extent. I don't understand transubstantiation thoroughly. Therefore I can't believe it.' "

" Bother your logic ! " said the doctor. " My intellectual work has been experimental, and my recreation either art or the classics or a surface-view of other people's ideas. I have had no time to examine them. Give me something to tell the people when they irritate me by their platitudes."

" I think you might ask them, then, whether our Lord, when He said, 'This *is* My Body,' and 'This *is* My Blood,' meant what He said or not—reminding them firstly that the word 'is' cannot have been used for 'represents,' in default of a proper word, since, as Cardinal Wiseman has shown, there are more than forty words for it in Syriac, and secondly that any doubt as to the truth of our Lord's words must involve a doubt of His divinity. What they would say I don't know ; but the question is an awkward one for a man who is not prepared to accept either the plain meaning of the words or the consequences of rejecting it. You might go on to say that our Lord, when He told the Apostles to do in remembrance of Him what He had just done, must have meant it to be done with the same effect ; for otherwise we must suppose either that He told them to do what He never meant them to do, or that when they repeated His words and action, the bread and wine became their own body and blood. Then you might ask them what our Lord meant by saying, 'Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world,' if He intended that this and other powers given by Him to the Apostles should die with them. You may say all that, and a great deal more, just as self-

evident ; and when you have said it, your hearers will repeat the same objections in the same way to the next comer. Argument, however conclusive it may be, is useless when the hearer's mind is shut against it."

The doctor winced at this indirect hit, but he only said :

"Thank you ; I shall make use of that. I should like to go into a few more things. The infallibility would be no stumbling-block to me, if I could believe that the Catholic Church was founded by our Lord, on St. Peter, to last till the end of the world. It would be a necessary consequence : therefore I can defend it from that point of view. But I should like to hear what you have to say about it. I can't see that it implies any more restraint than all authority does. All teaching implies a quasi-infallibility in the sources of it, and resolves itself, when necessary, into that of the head teacher. Therefore, assuming that the Pope and the bishops are in the place of St. Peter and the Apostles, who were taught and inspired by God incarnate, it follows that the Pope, representing St. Peter, to whom our Lord clearly gave the headship of His Church, must be absolutely infallible when he speaks, *ex cathedra*, on faith or morals. From the Catholic standpoint I can't see how any other conclusion can be arrived at. As to its being new, they might as well have said that the Catholic Church didn't believe in the existence of God till the Council of the Vatican defined it. It has always been notorious that Catholics believed in the Pope's infallibility. All the old Protestant books of controversy throw it in their faces. It's downright humbug to call it new, and nonsense to deny its being an unavoidable consequence of believing that the Pope is the successor of St. Peter and the Bishops the successors of the Apostles. All depends on believing that—but then I don't."

Here the doctor made an emphatic pause, as if waiting for some notice of the final statement. Everard looked and laughed, and looked again half seriously.

"Wouldn't a W be better," he said, "than a D, to make the word tell the precise truth, as I am sure you would wish it to do?"

"Come, now—your Church doesn't tell you to judge others."

"I am not judging, and I don't want an answer. The answer must be from you to yourself. If you are sure of

your motives, well and good ; but I have not found myself so invariably sure of my own."

"Ah ! well—we must do our best. We know very little of anything. Won't you say something about the infallibility, after my stout defence of it, from your own point of view ?"

"What sort of thing do you want me to say ? I am not a theologian, as you know. All I can think of, at this moment is, that it gives freedom of thought by showing where rocks and shoals are. You can't (unless you are reckless) steer boldly on the open sea of inquiry, if you haven't a chart and a compass. The chart, in this case, is the constant and universal tradition of the Church. The compass is the divine light that enables the Vicar of Christ to guide St Peter's bark by a power not his own."

"True, most true, remarkably true," said the doctor, "assuming that the Catholic Church was founded by our Saviour."

"Have you any reason to give for denying it ?" said Everard. "I shouldn't have asked you the question but for the challenge."

"Well, I can't see any need or any probability of a visible Church. I don't believe that God would require us to see what so many true believers in God can't see."

"If that reason is valid, the Jews were not required to believe in the divinity of our Lord ; for they were true believers in God—the only true believers in Him, and though our Lord was present among them, His divinity was veiled. Are you prepared to say that they were not required to believe in Him ?"

"Of course I am not. But I don't see that the cases are the same. The Jews had witnessed His miracles."

"Yes, but they persuaded themselves that He worked them through Beelzebub, just as people persuade themselves now that the power and unity and permanence of the Catholic Church can be accounted for by 'wonderful organisation.' The cases are precisely the same, from the point of view that you take. If your reason is valid for yourself, valid it must be for the Jews. I say nothing about the question involved in the one case or in the other. I say that your reason won't do, and I defy you to prove that it will."

"I tell you what," said Dr. Ranston. "I must get up an

answer. I can't keep pace with you in answering."

"Very well. But all this is leading nowhere, as I said before. If you want to do any good to the people who irritate you by putting your own opinions before you in an unpleasant light"—

"You certainly have a way of taking the dignity out of one's opinions, and making one almost grateful for it by that smile of yours. But what do you want me to do?"

"To see whether your polemical friend is a Christian at all, to begin with, and try to make him one if he is not. Many people now go in the category as Christians who don't really believe in the Incarnation. Are you quite sure that you do yourself?"

"What will you ask me next? Of course I do. The state of society under the great Pagan Empire was so hopeless that there is only one way of accounting for what was founded out of it; and that is, the life and death of the God-Man, and the spirit He infused through His apostles into the world."

"A very strong inference to put before an intelligent heathen, but hardly what would occur to a Christian as his reason for being one. It hasn't the true ring about it."

"Hasn't it? I am curious to know why you think so, and what you suppose to be the reason of it."

"I think so because the *causa efficiens* of belief in Christian doctrines is faith. History may help you to it, and so will many other things; but when you have it, you don't account to yourself in that way for having it, because in fact you did not have it in that way, though you may have been so led up to it. As to yourself—don't ask me. There is no good to be done by it."

"But I must know why there is not, in your opinion, the 'true ring' about the reason I gave."

"Well, if you *will* have an answer, I must give one; but I do so under protest, for I fear that you will run the risk of knowing more than you are prepared to profit by."

"Leave that to my own conscience. I want an answer."

"Then I must first ask you this question:—Do you believe the blessed Virgin to be the mother of God?"

"The mother of our Saviour, of course."

"And is He, or is He not, God?"

"Yes: but when He came on earth He came as a man.

She was the mother of the man, not of God"—

"And did He cease to be God by becoming incarnate?"

"Why of course He was God in Heaven, but she had nothing to do with His Divinity."

"Then His Divinity had nothing to do with His manhood. The one proposition is a necessary consequence of the other. There could be no hypostatic union."

"Well, call it what you like, I can't see how there could be any union of the Divine and the human."

"I thought so. Then, in point of fact, you don't believe in the Incarnation, but in your own idea of it; and that idea is Nestorianism. The conclusion is inevitable. If the Blessed Virgin is not the mother of God, as the third Council of Ephesus proclaimed her to be, in answer to the Nestorians (who said, like you, that the nature of man was not united with the nature of God in the person of our Lord), our Lord while on earth must have been simply a perfect man, a sort of emanation from the second Person of the Trinity, having a certain amount of divine power, not his own, but delegated to Him. This is the sort of thing we come to, if we stumble at the threshold of Christianity by not realising the true position and character of the blessed Virgin, who brought the Saviour into the world. St. Eucherius says, '*If you would know how great is the mother, think how great is the Son*;' and if, as I have said, we do not realise the true position and dignity of the mother, we lose sight either of the Godhead or of the humanity of the Son. The Gnostics did the one, the Ebionites the other. One or other we must do, to be consistent, if we deny that she is the mother of God."

"Well, but granted, for the sake of argument, that she is"—

"No, thank you. That would imply your being able to answer what I have said. If you can, do so."

"Take it for granted, then, that I cannot," answered Dr. Ranston, after some uneffectual thinking. "What were you going to say?"

"Nothing when I left off," said Lord de Freville. "But then I assumed that you believed in the Divinity of our Lord, which you implicitly deny by saying as you did just now, that the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of our Lord only as Man—not the Mother of God. Just consider the case as

it stands, and answer the question for yourself. If A is the Mother of B, and B is Prime Minister, A is the Mother of the Prime Minister. But she is not the Mother of his Prime-Ministership, because that is an office, not a person. In like manner, proportionally, the Blessed Virgin, being the Mother of our Lord, who *is* God, must be the Mother of God, but distinctly not of His Godhead, because that is eternal and spiritual. You cannot deny that A is the Prime Minister's mother, without implicitly denying that B is the Prime Minister, when everyone knows that he is so; and for the same reason, you cannot deny that the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God without implicitly denying that our Lord is God."

"That is unanswerable," said Dr. Ranston. "But—again how can her being the Mother of God prove the Immaculate Conception?"

"First of all, let me ask you what you understand by the term?"

"I suppose it to mean that the cause of her birth was miraculous—not in the usual way."

Why that was the heresy of the Collyridians in the fourth century, who were answered by St. Epiphanius. Don't you see that it would make her a goddess and (if one may say so without irreverence) add a fourth person to the Blessed Trinity. These odd notions about the Immaculate Conception are not new to me. I have heard some very curious things about various Catholic doctrines, and heard of still stranger notions. Once, on board an ocean steamer, a man who was talking against the infallibility, said: Do you mean to tell me that, if I were to fire a pistol at the Pope, the bullet wouldn't go through him?' People laughed; but really his definition was not further from the fact than the revived Collyridianism that you, a man of powerful and cultivated intellect, have supposed the Church to be capable of putting forth."

"I admit it," said Dr. Ranston. "I was talking of what I didn't understand, and forgetting the scientific accuracy of your theologians. Now, what *does* it mean?"

"The facts will explain themselves. Eve was free from sin at her creation, wasn't she? and ceased to be so at the Fall, which entailed original sin on the human race. The blessed Virgin, by explicitly consenting to be the mother

of the Redeemer, saying, '*Be it unto me according to Thy word*,' became, of her own free will, the instrument of the redemption, as Eve by consenting to the words of the tempter, became the instrument of the Fall. Is it so? or is it not?"

"I never thought of it in that light before; but there is no denying the fact."

"Well, then. As Eve, the voluntary instrument of the Fall and the mother of the human race, was created innocent, free from sin, in fact immaculate—don't be afraid of the word, but look at its derivation (the Fathers use it as speaking of the immaculate earth out of which Adam was formed)—is it likely that the Blessed Virgin, the voluntary instrument of the redemption, the mother of the Incarnate God, would have been conceived with the taint of original sin in her?"

"I don't think it is: but original sin altogether is a puzzle to me. It seems like forcing sin on people."

"How do you make that out? If a man is naturally idle, is idleness forced on him? Hasn't he a will to resist it with? But we are going from the point. You have admitted the improbability of her being conceived in original sin, and the Church teaches that in fact she was not. The Immaculate Conception simply means that by the merits of her Divine Son, she was preserved beforehand from incurring the stain of original sin. It was not removed at or before her birth: it was never permitted to be in her. The dogma is a necessary consequence of her being the mother of God, which the third Council of Ephesus, proclaiming the faith and traditions of the Church against the Nestorians, defined her to be. In the oldest of the Eastern liturgies, which is ascribed to St. James—I am quoting roughly from memory out of Archbishop Ullathorne's exhaustive book on the '*Immaculate Conception*'—you will find that she is called, '*Our most holy, immaculate, and most glorious Lady, Mother of God, and ever Virgin Mary.*'"

"There is a wonderful consistency in it all," said Dr. Ranston, "rather too much. The parts fit together too well. The gospels, as Paley (I think) remarks in his Theology, lead one to infer their truthfulness from the fact, that their statements don't all fit in so exactly."

Everard said nothing, but looked at him as before.

"What is that provoking smile, for now," asked the doctor.

"I was only wondering," answered Everard.

"What at? You can't deny the fact, and I don't see how you can dispute the inference."

"I am not going to deny the fact or dispute the inference ; but I deny their having anything to do with the character of my argument about the Immaculate Conception. The discrepancies you find in the gospels are only small variations that don't affect the nature of the facts related—as for instance, in the case of St. Peter denying our Lord. It matters not whether he denied Him once before the cock crew, or thrice before the cock crowed twice. The essence of it is that he did deny Him, and that his denial was marked by the crowing of a cock, as our Lord had predicted. You are confusing records of facts with arguments drawn from a comparison of facts, and because little unimportant discrepancies in the narration of facts by different people are a sign of truthfulness, rather than the reverse, you think that inconsistency, or, in other words, illogical reasoning is an essential condition of trustworthiness in putting together the evidences about a dogma. Don't you see the two middle terms, *par nobile fratrum*, staring at you? The upshot of your objection is that we ought not to be logical about religion. The idea has grown up in England since the Reformation, and flourishes in its own way among that large but diminishing number of people who, while they take it for granted that to be a Catholic is out of the question, have an instinctive dread of the infidelity which they feel lurking in the dark at the end of their own principles, and have no alternative but that of shutting their eyes and making an exceptional law against logic."

"But we are told that we must bend our reason as regards spiritual things," said the doctor.

"As you understand it, no. We are told to bend our reason in obedience to faith—that is to what is above reason and beyond its range—and the Apostle St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, defines faith to be 'the evidence of things that appear not,' or, in the Protestant version, 'things unseen.' But we are not told to bend our reason in obedience to nonsense—to illogical arguments, which are below reason. For instance, the Trinity of God is beyond the range of human intellect, but is not contrary to reason :

for in a shadowy way you can find a sort of triunity in your own soul, when you think of yourself and naturally love yourself. When, as Father Liberatore says, 'anyone knows and loves himself, he in a manner triplicates himself in his own being, inasmuch as he is in himself not only by identity of being, but also as the known in the knower and the loved in the lover.' ¹ The *you* who know and the *you* who love are one and the same *you*: and the love proceeds from the knowing and the loving."

"True," said Dr. Ranston. "It *is* so—clearly so. This is very suggestive."

"Faith," said Lord de Freville, "must of course be supreme because it comes from God: but on the principle that logic ought to be kept out of religion there is neither reason nor faith. True faith is not afraid of true reasoning; it is not afraid of arguments, logical or illogical: for God infuses faith into the soul, and no one can steal from us a gift of God, except through our own fault. Right reason, knowing its own sphere, keeps to its own work. Don't you see that faith shows us the necessary object of belief, while reason teaches us to express it, or defend its truth when attacked?"

"Yes; but the difficulty is to know where faith ends and speculative aspirations begin."

"There can be no question about that. They are sometimes precursors of faith; but they never can follow it, because faith is fixed and speculation implies uncertainty. Whenever they seem to do so, you will find that what seems to be faith is really nothing more than opinion stimulated by desire."

A shadow came over the doctor's face.

"Why do you try to spirit away my faith and father it on a wish?" he said in a melancholy voice.

"God forbid!" answered Everard. "It was the fear of disturbing your mind without settling it that made me so shy of answering you. That was what I really meant by 'leading nowhere.'"

"Never mind! One *must* be disturbed sometimes, if one tries to do one's best."

¹ Della Conoscenza Intellettuale, Vol. ii., Cap. ix. cf Summa P. I
Q xxxix. a1.

"One can't do more than that," said Everard; "but I find the measurement of one's best liable to mistakes."

"Yes, of course. Human judgment must often be erroneous. But we were speaking of the Immaculate Conception. I have no sort of prejudice against it—quite the contrary. But isn't it a modern idea? I ask for information. People say that it is."

"They do, on the curious hypothesis that defining a truth is inventing a lie. We had that before, about the Infallibility; and you made a very just remark about it. I have a book in the house on the Immaculate Conception, if Hubert has brought it back, that will tell you what you want to know. I have already taken from it most of what I have been saying. It was written some years ago by the Archbishop Ullathorne, and is in one small volume. It has been translated into many languages. You won't lay it down oftener than you can help, if you once begin it. Speaking of what the Fathers wrote on the subject, he says (I am quoting as well as I can from memory), that they rivalled each other in drawing out the resemblance and the contrast between Eve and the blessed Virgin—that they compare the original innocence of the one with that of the other, and show that our Lord was born of a mother free from the curse of original sin, as Adam was formed out of the virginal and as yet immaculate earth. Among those who made this comparison between Eve and the blessed Virgin were St. Justin Martyr, who was born at the beginning of the second century, and St. Irenæus, a disciple of St. Polycarp, the disciple of St. John the Apostle. Compare their comparison with these words in the Canticle of Canticles (Song of Solomon, as your version, I think, calls it) '*Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee. . . . Under the apple tree I raised thee up—there was thy mother corrupted. . . . My spouse is as an enclosed garden, and a sealed fountain.*' Now, I ask you first, whether, comparing the third chapter of Genesis with the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, those words are applicable to the blessed Virgin or not."

"Clearly they are. They couldn't apply to Solomon's wife, nor to any woman but one. If not, they are a mere collection of poetical images with no foundation in fact—which would imply that they were not inspired—and their

wonderful applicability would then be accidental—which would be harder to believe than their obvious meaning."

"Do they," said Everard, "point to the resemblance and the contrast which the Fathers have rivalled each other in drawing out, as Archbishop Ullathorne shows?"

"They do distinctly."

"Would the words, '*There is no spot (or stain) in thee,*' be applicable to the blessed Virgin, if she was born in original sin? Baptism cleanses us from the sin, '*sed infirmitas manet,*' as the Roman catechism tells us, quoting from St. Augustine. Could it be said of any one not free from original and actual sin, '*There is no spot in thee?*' It sounds even stronger in the Vulgate—'*Macula non est in te*'; and if you prefer the Greek, as less Popish, the Septuagint says, *μῶμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν σοί*. Does this point to the Immaculate Conception or not? and is it old enough for you?"

"Yes, it is. You have given me a great deal of valuable information and suggested still more."

"And yet," said Everard, "the discussion, as I predicted at the outset, has led nowhere."

Dr. Ranston made a vague gesture of dissent, but said nothing, and appeared relieved, rather than disappointed, when he saw Hubert, who had just returned from Chase End, come into the room, carrying a bundle of papers.

"I see there is some business for you," he said, preparing to leave the room.

"Wait a moment," said Everard. "What is it?"

Hubert put the papers into his hand, saying:

"The evidence. I brought it with me last night, and have just taken it out of my bag. I couldn't get it from the lawyers before."

"Do stay then," said Everard to the doctor. "I want your opinion about this. I have had his rights thrust upon me—you know the circumstances. Now I am sure there is a lie somewhere, and I am determined to find it out. This is the evidence. Perhaps it may give me a hint what to be at. I should be glad of your help."

"I feel sure you will be convinced by it," said Hubert, "as every one"——

"Whatever you may think, don't oppose anything he may wish to do about it," whispered Dr. Ranston, while

picking up a book that he had taken up and dropped on purpose. "I see that the interest he takes in it is the only thing that keeps him going—the one thing that may prolong his life."

"The thing is incredible on the face of it," said Everard. "My brother, Hubert Freville, died at Alassio, and, if these women are to be believed, the other Hubert Freville died at the same place and about the same time. Nobody shall make me believe that two Hubert Frevilles of the same age died at the same time and place, one coming from England and the other going there. In that they have betrayed themselves. They should have pretended the child died somewhere else. But then, nowhere else along the road would have been so convenient for their purpose."

"It was a curious coincidence," said Dr. Ranston—"two distant relations coming and going along the Corniche Road at the same time—and odd that they should both have been called Hubert."

"My brother was named Hubert, as one may say, accidentally," said Everard. "His mother, who died soon after he was born, in consequence of the shock of my father's sudden death, had only strength to say that she wished her brother to be his guardian. She was unable to speak when they asked her what name he was to have. Mrs. Roland, knowing that Hubert was a family name and the name of my grandfather, proposed it, and no one objected. So that was the name he was given. Now, then, who shall read this precious document. Will you?"

Dr. Ranston began to read out the evidence. It was substantially the same as that which Hubert had extracted from the two women, but with two additions. There was corroborative evidence about the colour of the eyes and hair, and there was a statement by Hubert himself, to the effect that, on searching his memory, he had a dim recollection of being brought to a strange nurse by a dark man-servant."

"You never thought of that till they put it into your head," said Everard, a faint colour rising into his cheeks and dying away as quickly as it came. "But I mustn't interrupt."

The doctor read on to the end, and said :

"It is wonderfully strong. I can't find a loop-hole in it.

But they might as well have brought forward the dark manservant, if he ever existed, and isn't dead."

"I should think so, indeed," said Everard. "But, in reference to the certificate, which they pretend to have given or sold, a strange idea has this moment come into my head. Hubert, you must go for me to the muniment room (Mrs. Roland will give you the key) and look in a small drawer of the oak cabinet for a bunch of keys, one of which will open the centre doors of the cabinet. In one of the little drawers inside you will find a foreign letter, directed to Sir Richard in a handwriting that you are not likely to forget. Please be as quick about it as you can. I can't think why it never struck me before."

Hubert ran off, and in a few minutes returned with the letter. Everard opened it, and taking a half sheet, on which the writing was different from the rest, handed it to Dr. Ranston, saying :

"Do you know this?"

"Yes, I do," said the doctor. "I see it is the certificate of the death of Hubert Freville, signed by me. I had forgotten it; but now I remember being called in to see an English child who was dying. I was travelling with an invalid, and we stopped to bait at Allassio. The child died, and then I was asked by the nurse to write this certificate for the satisfaction of the family. That accounts for my puzzle when I first heard your name."

"And mine too, when you gave me your card in the railway carriage. It suddenly occurred to me just now that yours was the name on that certificate; and so I sent for it."

"Then, in fact, he was your brother?"

"We always supposed so, but I begin to doubt it. Do you remember the date?"

"No; but I remember putting the whole story down in a journal, which I can find and bring here the next time I come. But how can it affect the question that you are working at?"

"I don't know yet: but a strange half suspicion struck me just now when you were reading that part of the evidence where the landlady mentions having lost the certificate, and the other woman acknowledges that she sold it to somebody unknown, for an English sovereign. I want to know

whether you saw or heard of an uncle who was his guardian. and was with him—the brother of my father's second wife."

"Moncalvo," whispered Hubert.

"Not then," said Doctor Ranston: "but I have an indistinct recollection of the name, or something like it. Some one called on me afterwards, at Florence, to thank me for attending the child. I can't remember what his name was; but I think I should know his face, if I were to see him. But why should she have wanted a certificate to take home, if an uncle or guardian was there?"

"Well," said Everard, "I can account for that. He wished to send it to Sir Richard. But his not appearing at Alassio has a very suspicious look about it, particularly as I have been told that the nurse in charge of my brother was ill at the time."

"Exactly," said Hubert. "Depend upon it, the old women at Chase End are right. He heard of the death of a Hubert Freville at Alassio, made away with your brother, got hold of the certificate of the child's death, and made one pass for the other. Coming from England, he would be likely to have English money about him."

Everard's countenance darkened, but he said nothing. He rang the bell; then leaving the room before it could be answered, met the servant in the hall, and asked to see Mrs. Roland. Mrs. Roland came, and he said:—

"What has become of Charlotte Wilcox? I have not seen her since I came home. I want to see her very much; for, between ourselves, I am beginning to suspect that there really may be some sort of truth in her story."

"I always thought there might be something in it, my lord," said Mrs. Roland. "I am sorry to say she is not here just now. I sent her to stay with my cousin at Peveridge Bay, for the sea-air. I advised her to go, because she had got into such a low way, particularly since you have been ill, and has been harping more than ever upon the death of the poor child. But I can write and get her home again."

"Do, by this post. It may be very important."

He went back into the gallery, but remained silent for a little time. At last he said to Dr. Ranston:

"You don't happen to remember, I suppose, whether

the child you saw had dark or light eyes and hair?"

"I don't," said the doctor; "but, if I am not mistaken, you will find my journal rather minute about the whole affair."

Everard asked no more questions, and said no more against the evidence. The cross-examination had shaken nothing, and independent witnesses corroborated its most important parts. Hubert's dim recollection of being taken to a strange nurse was the last feather in the scale. It remained for Everard to find out who Hubert was, and to solve the mystery of the two certificates. There was the one lying on the table, and, if the landlady had told the truth (which he had now no right to doubt), there was or had been another, for which an English sovereign had been paid. Were they the same? What, if they were? The Marquis Moncalvo had certainly sent Dr. Ranston's. A strange light, as of hope, came into Everard's eyes, but he said nothing.

"I don't know where I am, nor what may come out of this," thought he: "but, come what may, I must go through with it"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy.

—HAMLET.



THE wisdom of this attractive advice may perhaps be questioned, as being even more indefinite than the pompous principle of dressing according to one's position, which allows much to subjective notions of grandeur and gives no rule of measurement to restrain excess: but, whether Polonius was right or not, his advice is popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Lady Dytechley believed in it, though she had never read "Hamlet," except in a play-book at the Princess's and she applied the principle with a certain amount of judgment on certain occasions, one of which occurred in the evening of the next day.

Notwithstanding Sir Richard's repeated declarations that he didn't care for anybody, she believed very much in the power of pressure, and was prepared to use it with discretion at a suitable time. In the meanwhile she had a design on foot, in accordance with which Elfrida and Sir Richard were decoyed off to the Théâtre Français and the Marquis Moncalvo was cited to appear, under threats of unpleasant inquiries in case of default. He

Started [in both senses] like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons,

and applied opprobrious epithets to himself for not having left Paris : but he had to go.

Lady Dytchley's dress, when she received him, was impressive and symbolical. The stiffness of the skirt, the strongly-marked lines and vigorous contrasts of the trimming, the portentous length and springy movements of the train, all impressed him with the idea of a purpose intended and means of carrying out the same to his disadvantage. The quantity and quality of the materials, together with the art displayed in making them up on so large a scale, were typical of care, experience and resources. When he entered the room, between eight and nine in the evening, the manner of his reception convinced him that there was more in the symbolism of dress than he had hitherto supposed. From a centre of rustling silk, that hid the arms of her chair, she rose very slowly, and holding her right hand before her without offering it, looked at him as Queen Elizabeth would have looked at the "proud prelate," had he been present when she wrote at the end of her letter, "*Yours as you demean yourself.*" Then, drawing her hand back as soon as he had taken it, she sat down again between outspreading masses of drapery, and said :—

"Is this the way you spend the honeymoon, after playing the *spasimato*, and suppressing letters to deceive everybody, and getting off by the forbearance of a man who could have crushed out your life in a moment and would have been justified in doing it. Yes! justified—you know that better than I do. What are you doing here, after all your professions and sentimentality, and swearing (by all that is sacred) that you only cared to be dancing attendance on Ida, and only wanted to have the chance of showing your

wonderful devotion. What have you done? Has she found you out? I don't envy you if she has."

"I am very sorry that you should have formed (I cannot tell how) so bad an opinion of me. I have had business in Paris, and am going to return immediately—this evening, if my visit here will allow me time to do so. As to the letters you speak of, you are hardly aware, I think, how grave a charge you are making without any grounds for it. Why am I to be made responsible for the post, and for every courier and every boy who may be sent to convey a letter to the post-office?"

The drapery rose and fell in ominous waves.

"That will do now," said Lady Dytchley, accompanying the words, with the short laugh that Sir Richard remembered so well, in connection with the terribly productive tantrum in the family coach. "Don't pretend anything to me. I know you, and you know that I do. Don't provoke me, or you will have cause to repent it; but listen to what I am going to say. You have heard, I suppose, if you ever get any letters from Ida, which I doubt very much, that Elfrida was engaged to be married"—

"To Hubert Freville," said the Marquis, making a shrewd guess out of his observations at Netherwood and in the Bois de Boulogne. I am very glad to hear it. I have the greatest regard for him, though he put me into a most painful position not long ago. When is the marriage to be?"

"Never!—and you must help it not to be."

The Marquis was not a man to be easily taken aback; but this imperious proposal was too much for him. His lips turned white and quivered.

"I am unable to understand your meaning," he said. "Why do you wish to break off a marriage that would be so satisfactory in all respects?"

"Why? It's just as I expected. Ida has found you out, and you have come away for that reason—don't talk to me about having business in Paris—and you don't hear from her. Now don't deny it. If it were not so, you would have heard all that has come out lately about that unfortunate young man."

"I was not likely to hear anything; for I have had to put off my journey from day to day, and I have not seen any one who knows him, or who has any connection with England.

But I will not and cannot believe anything against him."

"And who said there was anything against him? Isn't it enough that he turns out to be—what are you getting so white for? Don't make a scene, for goodness sake. Isn't it enough that he turns out to be the son of nobody-knows-who, but something very low, at any rate, and was put in the place of Lord de Freville's heir, who died on the journey home from Sorrento to Beynham? The two women who played the trick have come forward and confessed it all; and the lawyers examined into it before Lord de Freville died; and (to make it quite clear) Everard is now Lord de Freville. Now, that being the case, who and what is the young man who has gone by the name of Hubert Freville? Why, the son or nephew of the Italian nurse, of course, who got rid of the expense of him by palming him off on Lord de Freville as his nephew, and then got money for confessing the truth. You *must* have sense enough to see that. Do you suppose that I am going to sit down tamely and let my daughter make such a marriage as that? Now there are two things that you must do. In the first place, you must get me the proof of his being her son"—

"You require an impossibility."

"No, I don't."

"Really, you do. How could I prove it, even if it were true?"

"I was going to tell you how—only you *would* interrupt me. You must go to Lyneham"—

"No!" said the Marquis emphatically. "I cannot go there. Surely you must see that I cannot, under present circumstances."

"You should have thought of the circumstances before you made them. You will either do as I tell you in every particular, or I shall tell Ida what you did with Sir Richard's telegram about Everard. I heard that from the courier, from whom you got it under pretence of taking it to me. He is with me now. Don't dare me, or I will bring him up into this room, and have the whole thing out before you. Hold your tongue now! I won't waste any more time in hearing you try to make out that black is white. You must go to the White Hart at Lyneham. The landlady is the other woman—there were two in it, and you must find out from her where the Italian woman is. Then you must go

after her, and you must say, 'I know for certain that he *is* your son' "——

"But how *can* I say that?"

"Hold your tongue! If you don't, I declare I will ring for the courier, and convict you before your face of making away with the telegram, and write straight off to Ida. I know more about you than you think: so don't let me hear any more excuses. You must tell her, I say, that you know him to be her son, and mean to send the police after her, unless she gives the proofs of it, but that if she does so, she shall be rewarded. I will pay her a hundred pounds for the proofs, or more, if you think it necessary: but have them I must. That will be the first thing you have to do. And, I must say, I am surprised at your hesitating about it, after my standing up for you, as I have, against everybody, when you had acted in such a way that I have never got over and never shall get over the disgrace you have brought on us all! Now hear what the other thing is, and don't interrupt me. It will be for your good, as you will see before I have finished what I have to say."

The Marquis felt that (to use a familiar French idiom) he must accept the situation, and get out of it afterwards as he best could. Lady Dytchley proceeded to unfold the second part of her instructions.

"If Sir Richard would listen to reason," she said, "there would be no occasion to do more than get the proofs I speak of: but he won't. He declares that she shall marry him, whoever he may be. I don't know how *you* may like the idea of your sister-in-law marrying a man like that; but, on every account, *I* am not going to stand it, and, as I shall show you presently, you are as much concerned as anyone. If nothing is done, the marriage will take place within three months. Sir Richard is bent on it, and Elfrida thinks herself bound to fulfil the engagement that she made hastily, out of gratitude to him for resenting—*you know what*. All I want is to gain time. Elfrida really cares for Everard. I have seen that most clearly for a long time; only she wouldn't allow herself to think so, because he was engaged to Ida. She is exactly suited to him, which I don't think Ida was. Now if you can get this young man out of the way—I am going to show you how—she and Everard will be thrown together under different circumstances

when we go back to Netherwood, and then" ——

"But I heard that he was not expected to live."

"Nonsense! A man of five and twenty, as strong as a lion, to be killed by a journey after a hard ride! He is better already and has been on horseback. Wait till he meets Elfrida again, and feels himself free. Why, he was riding about with her every day and all day while we were at Florence."

"You have taken a great load off me by your account of him," said the Marquis, "a very great load."

"I am glad to have done so," said Lady Dytechley, "and still more glad to see that you feel what you have done and what you owe him. It is in your power to undo the dreadful harm you have done him. It is in your power to save the life of the man you deceived, and who spared your life afterwards."

"What am I to do?" said the Marquis. "Anything that I can do for him" ——

"You must get this young man away" ——

"But he is his best friend. He would never" ——

"Fiddle-de-de! It will be for the good of all. Elfrida is made for Everard. Everard will die, to a certainty, if he is not brought round by finding in her what he only dreamt of in Ida. The other man will be much happier without her; for he isn't suited to her, and she isn't the sort of girl to make it pleasant without. You know what that means, I think."

The Marquis knew too well, but gave no sign of his knowledge.

"You see then," said Lady Dytechley, "that you will save the name and title and two properties from extinction, do a cheap act of justice where you owe *everything*, and do good to everyone concerned, but particularly to yourself—yes! to yourself—mark that! For when Everard is happy with Elfrida, he will be out of your way. Good gracious!—Can't you see that?—and you will be able to gain Ida's affections, which you have not gained, and never will, as long as she has in her head the romantic idea that he is dying for her sake. He will be an impassable barrier between you, unless you can show that he is happy without her."

A gleam of light, soft and intense, rose up for an instant in the melancholy eyes of the Marquis Moncalvo and

vanished like the flame of a lamp that has no oil to feed it.

"You have given me every possible motive to do as you wish," he said; "but what can I do? You wish me to get him away, out of England, I suppose; but how can I do that—I, of all men in the world? No one could do it but Elfrida, who of course would not."

"I don't know that. She would if you were to show him the way of finding out his parentage. You can do that through the Italian woman I spoke of just now. Here is her name: you had better take it down. Here it is, mentioned in the last letter Sir Richard had from Hubert. It will only be a question of more or less money, and more or less time; and the longer the time the better for us all. I said that he was the son of that woman, because I was so vexed at the whole thing; but she may be able to prove the contrary. She declares that he is of high birth, and he has every appearance of being so. You must ferret it out through her, and then make her write to him, saying that she has it all in train, but that nothing further can be done, unless he comes himself. Then you must make delays, and if you could manage to have some part of the evidence in America or Australia"—

"You must be joking," said the Marquis. "How can I make the evidence be where it is not?"

"Don't provoke me to remind you what you can do in cases where stratagems are said to be allowed. You have done such things for a bad purpose, and you shall do them now for a good one, or you will bitterly repent your refusal when too late—mark my words, you shall!"

"You mistake me. I am not refusing to do what I can. I only want you to think of something that can be done without compromising not only myself, but you and all your family for ever. Surely you would not like to see the husband of your own child acting like a common impostor."

"Of course not. What is the use of talking in that way? But can't you see that there are all sorts of clues to a thing? Sometimes the one that seems nothing at all turns out to be the very one you wanted. In a case like this there are sure to be numbers of witnesses. One or two of them are sure to have gone away, nobody knows where; and unless you try those distant countries, where everybody goes now when they can't get on at home, how in the world can you get at the truth? There now—that will do. I am going to stay on

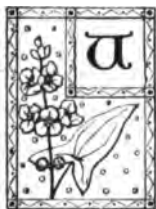
here some time by myself, on purpose to see you after you have been to Lyneham, and hear what you have done. You mustn't stop any longer ; for Sir Richard won't stay long at the Théâtre Français, and you had better not be seen here, just at this particular time, considering all circumstances and all that may come out of everything."

The Marquis was of the same opinion, and having the further inducement of not knowing how many more threatening proposals might be in store for him if he stayed longer, departed with more inward alacrity than he cared to show.

"Can I really win Ida at last," he thought, "and save Everard after all? But then"—

A deep gloom settled on his features as he hurried away. He was trying to think without reflecting, and reconcile the incompatible.

CHAPTER XXXV.



UNCONSCIOUS of Lady Dytechley's plan for securing the happiness of every one, Hubert had gone to Beynham. The Marquis Moncalvo left Paris, but not his address, early in the morning. Sir Richard, perceiving that Lady Dytechley was herself again, took interior counsel, and remembering to his cost her Biblical quotations, told himself with serio-comic earnestness that he must flee from the wrath to come. He began at once to assert that his presence was required at home ; whereupon Lady Dytechley said :—

"I have been thinking so. And you are losing all the hunting too. I had rather not go back myself just at present, for all our sakes ; but if you go first with Elfrida, I can follow soon. Why not write now, and start the day after to-morrow?"

"I'll be off like a shot," thought Sir Richard ; "but I don't see why I should make a toil of a pleasure by travelling right on end, like a Queen's messenger."

Three days afterwards he set out, and went as far as Boulogne, where he sent a telegraphic message to Hubert at Beynham, saying:—

"Come to Netherwood on Saturday. We shall be there by Friday evening."

Hubert was then on his way to Freville Chase and near his journey's end. Everard was looking dreamily out of the southern bay window, watching from its western corner the crimson sunset, as it deepened and expanded till the last streak of its light had sunk beneath the purple outline of the distant hills. The bay itself, one of the projecting gables on the south side of the house, was on the right of a smaller one. There was another beyond that, and two others projected from the ends of the gallery towards the east and west. The four larger bays formed as many small rooms within the gallery, looking over part of the Chase on the left, the terraced garden to the front and the woods beyond. On the west, through a vista of chestnut trees, the view stretched out to the hills behind Bramscote. In the bay where Everard sat there was a writing table covered with letters, books and architect's plans. Having been advised by Dr. Ranston to avoid going upstairs, he had chosen this place, instead of his room in the tower, because it commanded the same view over the Chase valley, the same slope down the terraced garden towards the woods, the same rich landscape beyond with its undulating line of dark blue hills.

"And the old race will pass away soon," he thought, "like that setting sun. Thank God! here at least we have kept the faith. This house has seen evil days—and some of mine, perhaps, have not been the best—but such as they were, they are past, and time, with all that it contains, is passing from me, drifting by like a snow storm that darkens all but itself. I have failed to disprove the evidence that makes me the last of the Frevilles. I have failed as yet to find the smallest trace of Hubert's parentage, or even to show that he is not the son of a low adventuress, as every one but myself will of course believe him to be. Would that it were the worst failure! The old race has done some good work in its time, and, I trust, will not die dishonoured. Sooner or later all human things must come to an end; but faith belongs to the illimitable in time and in hope.

When the tie that bound my whole being was severed, torn asunder, shivered to atoms, one link remained yet possible, that link which death cannot break. I have failed to secure it,—and who shall help her now? There is no one but myself to do it—and only when I am dead. I must write a letter to her, and leave directions to have it given after my death. . . . I must write it now, while I can. Why did I never think of it till now, when I am exhausted and incapable of any effort? I must write it as well as I can, and do it better afterwards, if I live.”

He took the nearest sheet of paper, and wrote these words :—

“It is my desire and my duty to tell you two things before I die ; and, as my life cannot be reckoned on from one hour to the next, the present moment is the only safe one. I earnestly beg you to believe that I do not blame you at all for acting as you did, under the circumstances in which you found yourself after leaving England, circumstances which I know not, but which I can easily guess. I entreat you to believe that as it stands, for I have no right now to say more, nor you to listen. But I have another thing to say, another request to make—and it is quite my last. Attend, I implore you, by all that might have been and cannot be, to these few words. The position you were in at Florence and in Rome, which made the position that you now must accept and do your duty in, would not have been yours if you had not delayed returning to the faith of your baptism, when God had again infused into you what you had lost in your infancy without any fault of your own. If you had acted according to the light He gave you before there was any question of going abroad, you would have had a confessor to consult in your great difficulties, who would have advised you with prudence and experience. I am not blaming you for having put yourself in so helpless a position. Your difficulties before you left home were terrible and complicated. I know what they were, and I accept the consequences as the will of God for my own sins. I only speak of the fact, for the purpose of showing that the duty which was difficult and complicated six months ago is now easy, simple and imperative. Listen, I implore you, to these my last words from the brink of the grave.”

He put it into an envelope directed to Hubert, and wrote on the inside, “*To be given to Ida as soon as I am dead.*”

"It had better lie there," he thought; "and then Hubert will have it, whatever happens."

He drew back his chair suddenly and, rising from it in haste yet not without an effort, moved away towards the other end of the room. His face had a pink flush on it. Self-repression was pictured in his eyes. All his pulses were dangerously quickened.

"I thought all that was past," he said aloud. "I thought that I had built a wall of ice between her image and myself; yet the mere act of writing her name has raised fire and tempest within me when life is passing away. I have written it now, and it will not have to be written again. I cannot—dare not—write it again."

He wandered back to his chair and turned it half round, facing the length of the room opposite the south bays. The panelled wall was covered with old family portraits. Most of them had been left there by the apostate Lord de Freville when he sold the property to his younger brother. The last glow of sunset, yet remaining in the western sky above the line of hills, threw quaint lights and shadows over some of them, leaving the rest in deep shade.

"How that one seems to look at me out of his frame!" he thought, forcing a smile and trying to fix his attention on the portraits. "I hope he is not ashamed of the last Freville."

The golden hue of twilight melted into dusk, and the old portraits faded away, till nothing was left but their dim shadows in frames of carved oak tinted with gilding. Candles were brought in, but he made no use of them.

"I wish that somebody would come," he thought, "and make me talk of something, think of something. I ought to have measured my own powers before I wrote her name."

He turned the chair to the writing-table and looked at the plans of the church, but his eyes rested on them without taking notice. The image of Ida was before him, dim indeed by reason of his immense effort to make it so, but still there, though shrouded in darkness. Again he rose from the chair and began to walk across the gallery, but had not gone far when the door was opened and Father Merivale came in.

"I came to see how you were getting on," said Father Merivale. "I am afraid you have been doing too much."

"I suppose I have," said Everard, sitting down on the nearest seat. "People wanted to see me, and I don't like to be inaccessible. If I have gathered anything out of history and experience, half the misunderstandings and complications in the world have come from that; and I wish to avoid it in my own small sphere.

"You are quite right," said Father Merivale; "but, when a valuable life is in question, prudence must go before zeal. There is no danger of your being misunderstood about here. You have been overdone to-day in some way or other."

"I have, yet not entirely in that way. Hubert's business has weighed on me heavily since I found that nothing could be done. Dr. Ranston has not been able yet to put his hand on the missing volume of his journal. Even Charlotte Wilcox is detained by illness at Peveridge Bay. And then there was another thing that I tell you, and you only. I wrote a few lines, to be given after my death—I needn't say to whom. They were simply to say—but here it is. Perhaps you will take charge of it, and give it to Hubert when he comes. Tell him to take it to her when I am dead. I wish you to read it some day."

Tears came into Father Merivale's eyes as he took the letter.

"I feel sure that you have done well about it," he said, "admirably well. Now let me tell you where I have been to-day, and who I have seen. I have a budget of small news. I went to Lyneham, partly to do your commission at the White Hart, and partly (I think) to show off the new turnout you gave me. I put on a new coat, to be in keeping with the rest, and make Popery look respectable on market day. The pony made a sensation in the yard at the White Hart, and Gingerem the dealer said he knew a 'party' that wouldn't mind going up to a hundred to get him. Then I went in, and saw the landlady. She told me to say that she had not heard from her leech-like acquaintance lately; and then she insisted on going into the whole story. I think there can be no doubt whatever (so it appears to me) that her account of the transaction is true: but I also think with you that, at the beginning, she was simply let in for it by the other. There is no malice in her; but when the temptation was put in her way, she was too lymphatic to stand against the influence of a strong will, without a stronger support than she has ever

had. Then I went to Curling's to have my hair cut, and I met my old acquaintance (with a new name since I saw him last) De Beaufoy, and Sherborne with him. They both admired the pony and the new carriage critically, but they said nothing about my new coat ; so I called their attention to it. De Beaufoy was of opinion that Lady Ledchester would see in the whole turn-out a scheme for wholesale conversion, under the patronage of the Pope. All the world and his wife were in Lyneham, as if by common consent. Lady Oxborough had driven in, with her son Mr. Exmore and his intended. How she remembered me I don't know ; for I never was introduced to her, and only saw her once for a few minutes at Bramscote. But somehow she appeared to know all about me, and talked a great deal about Freville Chase, and made particular inquiries about you."

"If she had made inquiries about me six months ago," thought Everard, "she would not have assisted in wrecking two lives and destroying a family." But he only said :—

"I am much obliged to her. What else did she say ?"

Father Merivale saw the cloud that passed over his face, and wished that Lady Oxborough had been somewhere else on that day.

"She sent expansive messages," he said ; "and I think they were genuine. Then she asked me whether you were well enough to see people, as her son's fiancée had heard so much of the place, and she asked if she might bring her here one afternoon. I gave her a guarded answer, and put it all on the shoulders of Dr. Ranston."

"Thank you ; but I may as well face it at once, and ask them to luncheon. If I can bear what I have borne to-day, I can bear anything. Did you see anyone else ?"

"Yes—I wish I had not. I saw Sir Roger Arden, and he too asked me a question that I turned off from myself to Dr. Ranston, who is a very useful bugbear to keep people from bothering you. So you are not compromised in any way, nor expected to do anything."

"Thanks to you," said Everard. "What made you think of coming to see me just now, and amusing me so much, when I wanted you so particularly ?"

"I am not aware of any distinct information about it," said Father Merivale ; "but I know what you are, and what you have done, and what you have suffered, and are suffer-

ing. There is no one living that I know so well, or have so great a regard for, from my complete knowledge of you ; and I knew that you were alone, which you ought not to be. It would have been odd indeed if I had not come to see you as soon as I could. But I must tell you what Sir Roger said ; for it will amuse you, knowing his peculiarities. By the by, I forgot to say that I saw your friend the red-whiskered man, as large as life. I can't claim the honour of his acquaintance, but De Beaufoy told me who he was, and how he shot Sir Richard instead of a partridge, and made all sorts of blunders with excellent intentions. He is either married or going to be married to somebody from somewhere, and is staying now in the neighbourhood with some one. But here I am at fault, and so I had better go back to Sir Roger. He came while old Curling was intent on rubbing a lot of bear's grease into my head, and told me that he wanted to have a few minutes conversation. I was alarmed, having always found that a similar request meant something unpleasant and puzzling ; but I followed him, of course, as soon as I was released. He took me to the White Hart, as if I had not had enough of it in the morning, and went into that sitting-room in a corner, with a picture of a yeomanry review, and the shop opposite, where I have seen a print of a Newfoundland dog and small boys bawling in surplises for the last twenty years. He fidgeted about, and looked at the pictures inside and out, and coughed in a preliminary way. I have known him many years, and know his worth, and know how he dislikes doing a small thing of a disagreeable kind ; so I knew that something disagreeable in a small way had been put upon him, and he let it out by degrees, after he had emphatically said, ' What a nuisance people are, coming and bothering one like that ! ' ' Who has been bothering you ? ' said I, for I saw he wanted me to assist in bringing out the bother. ' Why, Lady Dytechley has been writing a long rigmarole,' he said, ' and wants me to make up a dinner party when she comes back, and take part in a scheme to set people right, and all that. But I don't see why I am to be made to get up a dinner-party for a purpose. I hate purposes in society. They always mean something disagreeable.'

" Just the sort of thing that would bore Sir Roger," said Everard. " He would do anything to serve anyone, in any

way, except entering into social diplomacy and abstract ideas. But what can Lady Dytchley want now? Has she a quarrel with anybody?"

"Well, you'll see. To make a long story short, the upshot of it was this. Lady Dytchley sent a present of a fur pelisse from Paris for his little granddaughter, Miss Sherborne, but she sent it to Bramscote, having heard that the Sherbornes were or might be away from home. She wrote therefore to Sir Roger, asking him to forward the parcel, if they were at Hazeley, and telling him that she should have to stay another three weeks or more in Paris, for dressmaking arrangements, preparatory to her daughter's wedding. When he had got as far as that, he stood with his back to the grate, which had nothing in it but coloured paper, and his face assumed a rueful aspect. 'Then are you expected to set the dress-makers right?' said I. He got up a very faint smile, out of pure civility, and then he stood and unfolded himself. He said, 'What am I to do? She wants me to ask Lord de Freville to meet her and Lady Oxborough at dinner, in three weeks or thereabouts—or rather when she comes home—and she lets out why. It seems that Lady Oxborough has said, or been reported to have said, that Lord de Freville won't speak to Lady Dytchley; and this is a scheme to show Lady Oxborough publicly that he will. 'He may or may not be able to go,' said I, 'but either way'—I couldn't get the rest out, for he burst in with, 'Look here, she wants to make a cat's paw of me, to ask him and get him to come out of friendship to myself. It's not at all a proper position to put either of us in, and very wrong towards him. Why is he to be trapped into meeting them both, just to please Lady Dytchley? Let them fight it out somewhere else. Now I want him to know how it is, and it's a very awkward subject for me to write about.' I saw what he wanted; so I promised that I would explain the whole thing to you, and I came away."

"I am quite prepared to go," said Everard, with a faint smile; "and you are bound to advise it, out of reverence for your old Benedictine motto, Pax."

Father Merivale looked at him for a moment, and said in a tone of deep feeling:—

"The resolution is heroic; but I hope you won't think of carrying it out."

"Why not?"

"Not at the cost of doing harm to yourself, when your health is of such immense importance, and when you are not, in any sense whatever, responsible for the result."

"But suppose it does me no harm? Won't it be a right thing to do then?"

"It would be more than right. It would be an heroic thing to do. But I can't advise what I think would be dangerous. You will see her and speak to her by and by, in the natural course of things; and that will be a sufficient contradiction to the report, if any exists, which I rather doubt. Why are you to have the first meeting in public, just to save her a little annoyance that she ought to feel? I don't see it at all. Sir Roger is quite right. It isn't a proper position for you to be placed in. Why can't she come home at once, and ask to see you here, and get it over quietly? It's all nonsense about the wedding-dresses. Why can't she get them from London like other people? I am sure Miss Dytechley doesn't want such a fuss about them. No, no. The more I think of it, the less I like the looks of it."

"It certainly doesn't bear very close inspection. But then, the example may do good to some one; and as to what may be said or thought about my going there to meet her—I am past all that."

"Yes; but there is such a thing as opening wounds."

"True; but how can one open what has never closed?"

"Well, you have three weeks to decide in; but I entreat you to be careful. I must say that the impudence of the proposal exceeds anything of the kind that I ever heard of; but there is more *savoir faire* in it than I gave her credit for. I don't at all like the idea of your going. I am more afraid of it than I can account for. But we have had enough of it for the present, and too much. Have you been on horse-back to-day?"

"Yes; but I expected Hubert, and came back soon; and then I took to looking over those plans and other business affairs. Then half a dozen people wanted to see me. I wish Hubert would come. Elfrida will be at Netherwood to-morrow or next day, and the more Sir Richard is reminded of him the better. Perhaps he will come by the five o'clock train."

"I thought I heard the big bell," said Father Merivale. "Let me see if he is there. If he is, I will be off."

"But I hope you are coming to dinner?"

"As punctually as the dinner-bell."

He left the room, and in a few minutes Hubert came in, saying:

"I couldn't come earlier. I have done a lot of things that I must tell you of presently. But first of all, there is an important letter for you to read, from the Italian woman."

"What is the gist of it?" said Everard.

"She says that she has got a clue to the name of my father, but has been obliged to go a long way about it; and she wants me to meet her somewhere in Calabria, where somebody is who can tell me all about it. You will see that she tells me where I am to find her."

"It seems odd that the landlady had heard nothing," said Everard. "Father Merivale inquired for me to-day."

"Well, at all events, I can't go. I can't possibly leave you for so long. In the first place, you have been too much alone, in spite of me, these last few days"—

"Never mind that. Besides, Elfrida and Sir Richard are coming to Netherwood to-morrow—I had a letter from her this morning—and I will ask them to come and stay here while you are away. The matter is far too serious to be trifled with. You must go. Be careful, however. We know nothing about this woman, and her face is against her. She might put you on a wrong scent, for fear of getting into trouble with the right people. Don't give her money till she has done what she undertook, or, at anyrate, not more than just enough to keep her going. If you start to-morrow by the half-past four train, and sleep in London, you will see Elfrida before you go, for they will be here by three. Now come and look at these plans and sketches that came by to-day's post. The style of the church, as you will see, is Early English of Edward the First's time. It will take all the time before dinner to look them over, and more too."

Which it did.





CHAPTER XXXVI.



LATE the next day Hubert, after seeing Elfrida for a few minutes, went to London on his way to Calabria or elsewhere. Sir Richard tried to be cheerful at intervals, but shook his head as often as Everard looked the other way, and muttered audibly more than once :

“ If I had but taken Father Merivale's friendly advice ! ”

The next morning he went to Netherwood for the day, and Everard rode out with Elfrida.

“ Have you got through the copy of the evidence,” he said, “ that I gave you last night to read ? ”

“ Yes, and your comments. There is nothing more to be said. Oh ! if I could but have overtaken that dreadful Italian woman last autumn—you remember the day when we rode here from Netherwood—I always felt that she had something to say, and that you were being defrauded of your rights in some way or other. If I had seen her, I might have got the truth from her then, and we might have been all happy, instead of—I hardly like to say it, but my mother might not then have ”——

“ Don't distress yourself by thinking about that,” said Everard. “ I wished at the time that you could have seen her ; but, on reflection, I felt sure that you could have done nothing. I should not have been justified in acceding to such terms as hers, and, if I had, I should have been placed in a most painful position as regards Hubert. One can't make out at first sight why she offered what nobody would have accepted ; but the fact was that she cared very little, comparatively, about me. She expected to get more from Hubert for saving everything, than from me for enabling me to grab it. She was sharp enough to wait until after

Christmas, when he came of age, before she tried it on with him. And now the death of two Hubert Frevilles, and that English sovereign given for the certificate, have yet to be explained. I don't like to think about it till I have got some information that I shall have soon."

"And I," said Elfrida, "have something on my mind that I can't bear to think of, and can't get out of my head, and can't understand. That dreadful man was with my mother a long while, one evening in Paris, while my father and I were at the Théâtre Français. I never knew that he was in Paris till afterwards, when my maid told me that he had come. Now what he could have come for I can't imagine; but"—

"When was it?" said Everard, pulling his horse back on his haunches.

"About a week ago."

His lips turned white, but he rode on.

"Why did I tell him this?" thought Elfrida. "I ought to have had more sense. I wish I had said nothing about it," she said aloud. "He was sure to come, being in Paris, and sure to choose a time when I was out, because he knows that I never could bear the sight of him. There can't be anything in it. What could he do? My mother knows him too well to trust him now."

Everard rode on, but gave no answer till he had gone some distance. At last he said:—

"Very true. When one has had one's head so full of private conspiracies for so long, one looks at things too much from that point of view. Now tell me something about yourself. It will be a very pleasant change, and I can do no good by talking of these other things just now. But first, let me too talk of something pleasant for once. I want to tell you all that Hubert did for me in Rome—I must have died but for him—and how heroically he has behaved since, under a most crushing blow, immensely aggravated by coming upon him when it did."

Their ride was short and slow.

"How unlike our former rides!" thought Elfrida, as they turned homewards.

He read her thoughts in her expression, and said: "The doctor curtails my riding just now, as you see; but I hope to get out of leading strings after a bit."

When they reached home he was told that the landlady of the White Hart wanted to see him.

She came in gradually, as if feeling her way on yet uncertain ground.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," she said, "for disturbing you so soon again; but I heard from her this morning, and she says that she can't get further without more money."

"Where did she write from?" said Everard with a calmness so evidently forced, that she became alarmed on her own account, and spoke unsteadily.

"Well, my lord," she said, "I can't quite make out the name of the place; but it seems to be somewhere in France, where her cousin had gone. Here it is."

Everard looked at the letter, examined the handwriting carefully, put it back into her hand, and said, "Thank you. I will let you know if there is anything further that you can do at present."

She backed out of the room, and was glad to do so; but, in the meantime, he had rung the bell, and then he gave an order that startled the household.

"I want my things packed for travelling," he said. "I shall go this evening by the eight o'clock train from Lyneham."

Dr. Ranston was expected before dinner-time, but he arrived early in the afternoon. When he came into the room he looked fixedly at Everard for a moment, felt his pulse, and said:—

"What have you been doing with yourself since I left?"

"Nothing," said Everard; "but something has been done that forces me to start for Calabria this evening."

Dr. Ranston sat down, and putting off his serious manner, said:—

"Have you been reading the 'Castle of Otranto?' If I didn't know you so well, I should think that you were trying to get a rise out of me. But jesting apart, it is simply impossible for you to go. I would sooner go myself, though I have more work to do than I can get through. What is the matter? Things can always be settled quietly by a little management."

"Generally speaking they can," said Everard; "but this case is exceptional. You remember the evidence that

Hubert brought, the last time you were here. I promised to pay the Italian woman, if she could find who his father is or was, and she promised to do so, if she could. The day before yesterday Hubert had a letter from her, saying that she had found a clue to it, and asking him to meet her in Calabria. He started yesterday. This afternoon, just before you arrived, the other woman from the White Hart at Lyneham came here, bringing a letter from her, asking for more money, and dated from a place in the south of France. Now the letter asking for money bears the stamp of truth, considering the character of the writer, and therefore the other letter, that pretends to be from Calabria—I only wish I had looked at the postmarks—must be a forgery or a trap.”

“I don’t see how it can. The woman has every inducement to act straightforwardly. It would be dead against her own interest to do otherwise.”

“She couldn’t possibly have been at the same time in the south of France and in Calabria,” said Everard.

“No, but she may have been on her way to Calabria, and written for money to get on, meaning the landlady to ask you for it. Was the handwriting the same in the two letters?”

“In my hurry I forgot to notice the handwriting of the first letter. It was a foreign-looking handwriting, and so was the other; but foreigners of that class write very much alike. I don’t suspect her. I suspect a man whose treachery I have experienced. He was with Lady Dytechley more than an hour last week in Paris, during the carefully arranged absence of Sir Richard and of Elfrida, whose marriage with Hubert she has lately tried to prevent. She has failed in her object; but I know her too well to suppose that she has given it up, and I know that the Fabian policy would occur to her as her only chance. Now she is very likely to have expressed a strong wish that Hubert were out of the way for a time, and that man, being in bad odour with her now and anxious of course to set himself right, would not be scrupulous as to the means he employed. I suspect that the letter supposed to have come from Calabria was written by him, or by somebody for him, and if”——

“Surely,” interrupted Dr. Ranston, laughing, “you don’t suppose he would get brigands to attack him and shut him up in a cave till further orders?”

"It's no use laughing about it," said Everard, becoming strangely excited.

"No, no," said Dr. Ranston, perceiving his mistake and much more. "I wasn't laughing at the thing itself, which of course might occur, even in these prosaic days, and would, as you say, be consistent with the antecedents of the man you suspect. What I meant, and ought to have said at first, was, that in this case there is no adequate motive for acting so, but just the reverse. He isn't a fool. He would know perfectly well that the thing must be traced to him, and could only ruin his character with every one, for no conceivable purpose or advantage to himself. That was what I meant."

"I know what you meant ; but this is no case for weighing motives that one can't understand without being on the spot and knowing all the circumstances. I know the man, and I know that he wouldn't stick at doing the thing. I know that Hubert would show fight, and I know what the end of that must be among a set of ruffians. Why didn't I make him take a brace of revolvers with him? I have been a fool throughout the whole business, and particularly in advising him to go. He didn't want to go, and I pressed him to go. I got him into the danger, and I will get him out of it, whatever happens. He was to stop in Paris to call on Lady Dytechley, and by starting to-night I may catch him up. There is no other chance. Don't try to prevent me, for I won't listen to anything."

"What I was going to propose, my dear lord," said Dr. Ranston, in a very gentle tone, "would help you to the object you have in view. Why not send that excellent servant of yours, who was in Rome with you? You could send a letter by him, and the thing would be done. Whereas, if you go tearing off like this, in your present condition, you are almost certain—I grieve to have to say it, but I must—you are almost certain to be dead before the train gets half-way to Paris. I only want you to do what will insure success, instead of what would prevent it."

"I suppose I must," said Everard, leaning back in his chair, exhausted and faint. "You are right, of course ; but I find it hard to realise how very little I can do now. I beg your pardon for talking so big."

"Why?" said the doctor. "You were quite right to feel

as you did. I only wish you were able to do as you would, though the other way will answer all the purpose. Now just let me write the letter for you and tell the man what he has to do—I understand it all perfectly—and you go and rest in your own room. Keep perfectly quiet till dinner time, and let your mind rest by feeling sure, as you really may feel, that all will be done satisfactorily.”

“I will. You are always doing me some great kindness. Tell Hubert in your letter to come back at once, and please tell Elfrida something that won't frighten her ; for she must hear that I am sending after him.”

In a few minutes Dr. Ranston had given Everard's orders to the servant and begun the letter to Hubert.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

*Tout est illustre en lui, moi-même je l'avoue,
Mais son sang, que le ciel n'a formé que de bon. . .*

CORNEILLE. DON SANCHE.



UT Hubert was already in Paris, intending to start for Marseilles the same evening. He called on Lady Dytchley and found her at home, writing a note. She was moderately dressed and mild in manner, but seemed rather more glad to see him than circumstances warranted.

“I am so glad you have come,” she said, “and so unexpectedly too. And yet how provoking ! Elfrida is gone home with her father.”

“Yes, I saw her at Freville Chase just before I left,” said Hubert. “They are staying there till I go back.”

“Ah ! I am so glad. It will be so good for Everard. How is he ?”

“He has been better ; but the excitement and worry of my sudden start has thrown him back.”

“How very sad it is that he, who deserves every happiness, has always had some disappointment or other ! I could see it long ago, when he and Ida used to be together at Nether-

wood ; and yet anyone would have thought then that nothing could be more suitable, or give a better promise of happiness. But alas ! it was not so."

"What does she mean ?" thought Hubert. "The promise would have taken care of itself, if she had let it alone."

Lady Dytchley sighed, and there was an uncomfortable weight in the sigh, as when she sighed before Ida at Florence, while speaking of Everard and his imputed cheerfulness.

Hubert felt that something was wrong, and she, perceiving his embarrassment, was the more confident in speech.

"What can be the matter now ?" she said. "I had hoped that, after the one bitter awakening had been gone through, he would—but what is this ? and what is this sudden start that you speak of ? What brings you all of a sudden to Paris ?"

"A letter, offering to prove who I am. For Elfrida's sake, for yours, for every one's, I had to start without delay."

"Is that all ? Then, I am sure, there is nothing that need worry him ; for no one would doubt your being well born, whoever your parents may prove to be, in the *dénouement* of this romantic story."

"I don't know about that ; but I had rather make sure of the fact."

"You are quite right, of course. I was reasoning like a woman, and thinking that you are sufficient in yourself to make any mother satisfied with her daughter's fate. I am sure I feel more than satisfied in every possible respect—except, unhappily, one—and that has nothing to do with yourself."

Hubert changed colour, and his voice faltered when he spoke.

"I have felt that," he said, "more than anyone I believe, on account of Elfrida, but most of all for the sake of Everard, whose chances of recovery have been and are endangered by it. In two hours I shall be on my way, and you may feel assured that I shall have neither rest nor peace till I can prove what I have now the clue to."

Lady Dytchley sighed again ; it was a sympathetic sigh, long and broken.

"If that were all!" she said, after a pause that appeared to stretch out beyond its own length. "Oh, if it were only that! As I said before, you are sufficient in yourself to make any mother satisfied, and more than satisfied. No! What I was thinking of, at the moment, is one of those dreadful complications that make life so sad—and cannot be remedied."

"But what is it?" said Hubert, his breath becoming short and troubled. "I don't know at all what you are referring to."

"I know that you don't, and you had better not. It was wrong of me to say what I did. Ifs and ands are of no use in the face of a *fait accompli*, and may even be cruel."

"Whatever they may be, you have said enough to show that I ought and must know what it is."

"Believe me, you had better not. Don't make me feel that I have brought disenchantment—I mean, that it really is wiser, sometimes, to take things as one finds them, and not run to meet disappointments half-way, that might never come in one's way. Take my advice, and be satisfied with the happiness you have, and don't spoil it by wanting too much. Keep the romance of life as long as you can, and the bloom that never returns when it has once been rubbed off. I had it once, and lost it long ago. I would have kept it, if I could: you can keep it, if you are wise."

Her voice trembled for an instant. She had forgotten her object in the remembrance of capabilities unfilled and aspirations extinguished. Hubert recalled her to it by again insisting on an answer. He had better not have done so, but of course he did. She roused herself quickly from the short dream of unrealised possibilities, and said, "If you *will* make me speak, I can't help it; but I advise you again not to press the subject."

"You should have thought of that before," answered Hubert, forced into unnatural bluntness by an impulse of simplicity. He felt as if some evil were about to happen that would not have happened if he had been absent and yet ought to happen because he was there.

"You had better think again," said Lady Dytechley, "and measure your strength before you oblige me to say what will give you great and unnecessary pain."

"Every word you say shows me more and more that I

must hear it. Please don't keep me any longer in suspense."

"Very well then—but I call you to witness that you have brought it on yourself."

"I call myself to witness that I did not," thought Hubert, putting himself into an attitude of imperious attention modified by anxiety. She remained emphatically silent for a few moments, and then began to speak again in a depressed voice, that vibrated under protest like a muffled bell.

"Then if you insist on my telling you," she said—"if you *must* be told, after my begging you so earnestly not to take advantage of my words, the truth is this:—Everard will die, if he goes on as he is at present—not really of heart complaint, as they say, but because the means of curing him are not available. I know the strength of his constitution and the strength of his feelings, and I know that one thing could save his life, and one only—and that would be, to find in reality what he fancied and dreamt of and believed in and lived on in poor dear Ida. He felt as if it were a reality, because he had grown up with the idea of its being so; and he is so conscientious and so full of feeling, that his imagination supplied what was wanting. I always said that their growing up under the idea of being engaged was a fatal deception and mistake. The event has proved that I was right. Her marrying as she did, in spite of all I could say shows that they never were really suited for each other, and that she never cared for him as he deserved, but only by the force of habit. Now I know who is the very one to make him happy, who is, and always was exactly suited for him in every way, and would have—but that is impossible now. Don't oblige me to go on."

"You *must* go on," said Hubert in a hoarse voice. "'Would have'—what?"

"Would have cared for him fearfully, if she could have allowed herself to do so. If nothing else had shown it, her inconsolable grief when he was in Rome so dangerously ill"—

"Tell me her name, and let me go," interrupted Hubert.

"Elfrida, if you—*will* hear it. The thing was evident, and only confirmed what they had both shown, without knowing it, at Netherwood last autumn, when they took such delight in each other's society that they were always

together. She told me that herself. Neither of them knew what it meant, because both are too conscientious to have allowed such an idea ; but they might and would have known it now, if circumstances had not prevented them. You see, the end came so suddenly, that she had no time to realise the barrier between him and Ida. If she had remained free long enough for them to have been thrown together at Netherwood and at Freville Chase, under their altered circumstances, there can be no doubt as to what would have been : but you proposed, she found you more like him than anyone she had ever known, and she accepted you. They are neither of them free now. I entreated Sir Richard not to let the marriage be so very soon. For your own sake, it would have been better to wait and see how far she and you might be able to know your own minds. But he would have it, and so you will marry without having the means of knowing the most important thing of all. He would listen to nothing. He has told everybody that the marriage will be on the first of May, and so I can only hope that things may turn out better than I can see any reason to expect—I mean, of course, as regards yourselves. For Everard there is no hope. You had better not have insisted on my telling you this. You might never have known or suspected that you were not the one person in the world made for her. Try to think that you are.”

Hubert had become unnaturally calm, like a cloud charged with electricity. “Thank you for the advice,” he said. “But do you suppose that I would consent to victimise her and murder my best friend, for the avowed purpose of deceiving myself? You have told me things that I was not aware of. I am obliged to assume that you believe what you have told me ; but I am no less bound to assure myself that it is, or is not. I am now going—I don’t know where, nor for how long. If I live to return, I shall make myself sure, one way or the other. I am not doubting your word : I only say that I shall do what I am bound to do. You ought to have told me long ago. You might have told me at once what you meant, I think, and not have tortured me by degrees. I don’t say ‘good-bye ;’ for it either means nothing, which I never mean, or something that I cannot at present feel.”

He turned away, not hurriedly, but with a decision that

left no opening. Lady Dytechley remained a long while where she stood when he left her. She had succeeded, but not triumphed, gained her point, but not insured the result. What if Hubert should put off his quest a few days, return to Freville Chase at once, and offer to release Elfrida from her engagement? Heroic and impetuous, he was likely to do so. And what then? This view of the case took immediate effect on the roots of her hair, causing them to feel hot and pointed. She began to examine the foundations of her statement, but found nothing more than a strong desire to believe it and a large amount of dissolving self-confidence. Mixed motives had guided her opposition to Everard: mixed motives had made her his unbidden advocate against Hubert: mixed motives were the cause of her alarm now. By wishing against Everard's engagement to Ida she had made herself half believe against it, and by wishing against Hubert's engagement to Elfrida she had almost persuaded herself that she was trying to make an act of restitution to Everard. In both cases worldliness directed, while habitual self-deception coloured the object in accordance with her wish.

With regard to the first, her mistake had proved itself on more principles than one. The second was on its trial. If Hubert would only take her word for the fact, and keep out of the way delicately, like a proper hero of a sentimental story brought out in numbers, all would go "merry as a marriage bell," and everyone live happily ever after; but if he should happen to make his act of heroism short, sharp and decisive, as befitted his character—oh!

It happened that he did not. He hurried along the Rue de Rivoli into the Place de la Concorde, and turning down to the banks of the Seine, spoke to himself silently.

"If I were not a Catholic," he thought, "if I had not known the true Faith and the Sacraments, I should wish to drown myself in the depths of that water and feed the fishes, or be picked out and put into the Morgue, if it still exists—to be stared at by travellers, among other known and unknown specimens of wearied-out humanity, and perhaps turned into the sentimental hero of a bad novel by some imitator of Eugene Sue. From my birth I have been in every one's way—the means of misfortune or the cause of sin. I was the cause of hatred and crime in my step-

mother—unless that story of my birth is a fabrication, like the first. I was the cause of criminal deception in one of the two nurses, and of culpable consent in the other. If I am what they now say I am, I deprived my father of his eldest son by the fact of being so; and, in either case, I have unwillingly been an impersonated lie most of my life, a scandal and a detected imposture to the man who had been like the best of fathers to me. Heavy blows indeed, but not crushing, though they fell on me at the worst moment. I had yet to learn that I had been beforehand the enemy of my best friend, his rival since, bringing misery on him and preventing its removal. If I had not cut out Everard by being palmed off as Lord de Freville's heir, he would have married Ida and been happy; for her mother would no more have seen that they were unsuited than he would have found it so. I stood in the way, and his hopes were blighted, his life nearly sacrificed, his race nearly blotted out. He had yet another chance. There was one who might then have saved him, and would. I stood in his way again, without knowing it, and now there is only one way to retrieve the ruin I have caused by existing. I must give up all. Give up? I have nothing to give. She is not mine, except in words uttered without knowledge of her own heart. I have to accept the loss of what never really existed, go far away, without any ostensible limit of time or place, and write something (I know not what) to say what I mean. Write something! To whom? Not to Everard, who would disbelieve the fact, refuse what is his to take—not mine to offer—and lose what would save, not only him, but with him all he so nobly represents. I must write to *her*, and say—what? Must I lie by implication, that truth may be free? I must, or the act will be but a mockery. I must tear my heart out, and smile as if doing so were a relief. It must be written when I am far away—I shall soon be far away. If I had not the Faith, I should read in the story of my life a dark, inexorable fate, instead of God's divine Will and infinite Wisdom. The guilt that surrounded me at the beginning, the prosperity that followed and the vicarious retribution closing around me now, are like the plot of an old Greek tragedy without the bloodshed and the unities. But what am I doing here, walking about and speaking to myself, like an actor on the

stage? I have to go, and then to say why, without telling the truth, and then—to mourn what was never mine, and knowing that it never was, feel its loss as if it had most really been. I have no right anywhere, no right even to the name by which I am called; yet I must return hereafter to Freville Chase, and see her there as the wife of my best friend, and endorsing the bond with my will, reproach myself in conscience for not being able to forget. Miserable whining! Have I no power to silence this wretched lamentation and tear myself away from clinging to a shadow? Can't I fix my mind, for a while at least, on the fact that I have to get my luggage and go? What have I done with it? I forgot the fiacre waiting at the door."

He turned back to look for it, and found that the driver had followed him, gesticulating at intervals to attract his attention.

Two hours afterwards he left Paris for Marseilles, meaning to go by sea to Naples and thence to the place from which the woman of the middling countenance had written or been supposed to write. A dark man followed him into the railway carriage, and sitting opposite, looked at him from time to time, as if accidentally, but never spoke. Hubert, not wishing to talk, changed his position, and soon forgot why he had done so.

When a great sorrow has full possession of the heart thoughts become emphatically one, and time passes like an unbroken shadow. On leaving the train, he felt that he had come from Paris and was at Marseilles. The interval was a blank. He had to wait till the next day for the steamboat, and that time also went by without measure.

The man who had looked at him in the railway carriage stopped at the same hotel, left at the same time and went to the same steamer. Hubert noticed him, but took no heed. As he was about to step on board a man came forward through the crowd that stood round, and calling him by name, put a letter into his hand.

It was the well-remembered John, who having just arrived from Freville Chase in hot haste had posted himself by the steamer, ready to catch him as he embarked. The letter was from Dr. Ranston, it was evidently written in extreme haste. There was no date and no definite beginning, but a

long blot, with traces of an illegible word or two, and then what follows :—

"I find Lord de Freville so much worse on your account, that I must beg you, as you value his life, to return as quickly as possible and telegraph to me that you are coming. He has taken it into his head that you are being decoyed into some danger—I need not say by whom—and he is so excited in consequence that I can do nothing with or for him. When I came here just now I found him on the point of going after you, and, I had much difficulty in persuading him to send John instead. I am very sorry to impede you in the important business you are on the way to do : but really it is a matter of life and death. I can see no possible danger for you, but he does, and I am simply powerless to do anything for him till he hears that you are safe and on your way home. Please telegraph without delay that you are starting homewards."

At the first words Hubert had put his hand on the luggage and hailed a fiacre. The rest he read on his way to the station, where he at once telegraphed that he was on his way back.

While strolling about, waiting for the train and beginning to understand that he had to do with a question of fact, in which the evidence of memory and perception was against Lady Dytchley, he saw the dark man again.

"That fellow has been dogging me," he said to himself. "It never struck me till now ; but he has. I suspect that Everard is right—he is sure to be so—and the Doctor wrong. But what on earth can it mean ?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the faithful John, walking up quickly ; "but that ragamuffin is up to something. He was at it down there by the steamer, and he came off directly we went. I heard his lordship say to Dr. Ranston that he is sure there is something up against you. If you don't mind it sir, I should like to get into the same carriage ; because such as he wouldn't be particular about trying it on with chloroform or something, and he wouldn't tackle two at once like that."

But the dark man appeared to avoid them, and was presently seen walking away, apparently in haste.

"*Abiit, excessit, evasit, erupit,*" muttered Hubert. "This puzzle is unpleasantly suggestive."



CHAPTER XXXVIII.



THE electric telegraph, which made war between France and Prussia, brought peace to Freville Chase.

On the day when Hubert was expected to return, and not long before the hour, Dr. Ranston came into the gallery with a small book in his hand.

"Fancy my having forgotten to give you this!" he said. "But you really flabbergasted me so, as soon as I came into the house, that everything else went out of my head. Here is the journal I spoke of, with the account of what happened at Alassio. I am afraid that the writing is not very legible."

"Suppose you read it out then," said Everard. "Don't mind Elfrida. She knows all about it, and the more she knows the better. Hubert will be here presently, if the train is not late. Perhaps we shall make something of it among us, though I hardly expect that we shall now."

"Well, then," said the doctor. "On the morning of the 21st of March, 1856 . . . I was travelling with an invalid by slow stages to Naples, and, going along the *riviera*, we halted at Alassio, and had luncheon. I have never been there since; but I remember it well, lying at the base of a steep and wonderfully picturesque descent, with the blue Mediterranean on the right—I don't know what depth below. I can see the hotel now, evidently an old palace, and the big room with decorated walls, where we had luncheon.

There is a lot written about it, I see ; for I had nothing else to do at the time. Well, here is what it says about the certificate :—

“*March 21, continued.—Just as we had finished luncheon a card was brought to me from an Italian doctor, asking me to come and see an English child whom he was attending in the hotel and whom he considered to be dying. I went, and saw a child of about three years old, with flaxen curls and light blue eyes. He was evidently dying, and he died whilst I was in the room. There was a fair, fat English nurse, who seemed in great distress, and an Italian nursery maid, who made a great noise—rather too much to be credible. The English nurse asked me if I would certify the cause of death, as my certificate would be more satisfactory than that of a foreigner unknown in England. I did so, and we left Alassio about two o'clock.*”

“It was in the spring of that year that my brother was taken to Italy,” said Everard : “but the entry in your journal seems to point, not to him, but to the child sent home to Lord de Freville by the two nurses. And yet yours was the certificate sent to Sir Richard.”

“It makes a very curious puzzle to be found out,” said Elfrida. “The two Hubert Freville’s, dying at the same place and, I suppose, about the same time, sounded strangely enough ; but as for both having the same coloured hair and eyes, when one of them was your brother—it is too much to believe.”

“The landlady at Lyneham mentioned nothing in her evidence about an English doctor being called in,” said Everard.

“No ; but she mentions the Italian doctor, and she mentions a certificate, and its having been sold, as she supposed, to a stranger. It gives me a dreadful suspicion—too horrible”——

Everard had become very pale. His mouth was compressed, and his eyes looked out fixedly, but not at anything visible. “What is it you suspect ?” he said.

“Well, nothing really,” she answered, wishing that she had not spoken. “We have Dr. Ranston’s word in the one case. However puzzling the thing seems, his journal *must* refer to your brother. And we have clear evidence in the other case.”

"No, no. That won't do, and you know it won't. You say so on my account, out of kindness; but the question is too serious to be pushed off. Besides, I have a suspicion myself—the same as yours, I feel sure. What is it you suspect?"

"That the child who died—Lord de Freville's nephew—was made to pass as your brother"——

"Yes—for the purpose of sending us a certificate of my brother's death. Now that could not have been done, if my brother had died by fair means. The people about here have been right by instinct. Inconceivably horrible!—horrible in itself and in its consequences. Subject to the will of God, I could wish to die before I am forced into the necessity of bringing this to light. But forced I shall be, for there is no one else to do it. We must see Charlotte Wilcox at once. She came back yesterday. If I had only listened to her long ago, perhaps I should not be as I am. One should never pooh-pooh anything. Elfrida, you can bring her here quietly, if you will get hold of Mrs. Roland, on some pretence, and tell her what is wanted."

Elfrida left the room and returned quickly, saying that Charlotte Wilcox would come in a few minutes."

"Here is another entry about it in the journal, I see," said Dr. Ranston, "dated a fortnight later."

*"Hotel, * * * Florence. A young Italian, the Marquis Moncalvo, called to-day to thank me for attending his nephew who died at Alassio. He showed much feeling when he spoke of his sister, also dead, the mother of the child. I asked him about the nurse, because I wanted that sort of person for a lady then staying at Florence. He said that the shock of the child's death had quite upset her nervous system, and made her unfit for any service at present. I was surprised, for the woman I saw had nothing nervous about her. She was a fat, comfortable-looking woman, who would relieve her feelings by crying quietly, and would have done very well for what I wanted. I proposed seeing her, telling him that I had turned my attention a good deal to nervous disorders. He looked, I thought, rather confused, and said that she had gone to England. As that was a valid reason for not seeing her, I said no more; but I wondered why he had not said so at once. He then, very unnecessarily, thanked me again, and went away."*

"One thing is clear," said Everard, "the woman you saw was not Charlotte Wilcox, my little brother's nurse, but the present landlady of the White Hart, who had charge of the other Hubert Freville. Now which of the two children did you see? and what became of the one whose death you did not certify? The child who died must, I think, have been Lord de Freville's nephew: for your description agrees with the completed evidence we have of what he was like, and not at all with what my brother was likely to be. I have not asked Mrs. Roland about that; but we shall have it presently from Charlotte Wilcox."

"It seems to me but too plain," said Elfrida. "His taking the trouble to find out Dr. Ranston at Florence, to call and thank him, shows that he had reasons for wanting the certificate; and his passing off one nurse for another, and one child for another, shows what those reasons were."

"Then what did he do with my brother?"

"What indeed? I had rather not think what."

"But I *must* think of it, and (worst of all) go through with it. They have forced it on me, among them. One thing has led to another, and brought this out at last. I dread hearing what Charlotte Wilcox will say—and here she is—but there is no help for it."

She came as far as the door, caught sight of Dr. Ranston, and stood still.

"I see," said Everard, "that you have guessed what I wanted you for."

"Yes, my lord, I did," she said, looking significantly towards the doctor.

"But you are afraid of speaking before Dr. Ranston. He knows all about it, or at least as much as I do. Tell me, if you please, all you know about my brother's death."

"Well, my lord, I am sure no one knows as much about it as I do, except those that wouldn't like to tell. I remember everything that happened then, just as if I saw it all before me at this moment; and I remember what happened before, just before—not that anything did happen, but only the feeling that came over me and turned out to be too true. I can't tell what put it into my head, for he had been very kind and pleasant, but as we came down that steep hill into the town (Alassio, I mean) I couldn't help thinking how lonely it was, travelling so far from home, and with a stranger

as you may say, and the dear child without father and mother, and no English person with him but me. I looked out at the horses, trotting as hard as they could go, and turning the corners, with nothing but a stone here and there at the edge, and the rocks going right down to the sea. We went so near the edge once, I thought we were going over ; and then, as he was playing with the child, it came into my head how easily he could let him down, and nobody but me to say it wasn't an accident, which of course wouldn't be credited, with no other witness."

"What made you think of that?" said Everard. "Had he given you any reason to mistrust him?"

"No, my lord, I can't say he had. It was a kind of a feeling, and true enough it turned out, only not in that way. The sun had been hot, and I was heated with running about to get off from San Remo ; for we had come away in a hurry at the last. And then it grew chilly towards the evening, and we didn't get in till late—quite dark it was, and an open carriage—with the things in another behind. I felt very chilly, and ill all over, and I got so bad that I was obliged to go to bed. I got worse, and had a bad feverish attack and was light-headed, so that I didn't know what was going on ; but as soon as I came to myself (that was five days after) I crept out of bed and called outside the door for somebody, to know who was taking care of the child, and how he was. A woman came and said he had been taken very ill. 'Where is he?' I said. She said, 'In a room at the end of the corridor ; but don't go in.' I said, 'Why?' but she only put up her shoulders and went off. I felt sure that he was dead, and I went straight into the room as soon as she was gone. I never shall forget it, not if I was to live to a hundred. There was a little coffin on the bed, and candles burning. I thought I should have dropped, and I don't know, I am sure, how I got across the room ; but I did, and then I saw that it wasn't him. It was a child of the same age, but with very light hair, not at all like him. I thought of the feeling I had, coming down the hill, and said to myself, 'He has murdered him, as sure as possible, to get the money that's to come to him.' I thought I should have gone mad, to think of the poor dear innocent child, and an orphan too, being made away with by those that ought to have protected him. I dressed myself, ill as I was, and went

and taxed the Marquis with it to his face; and I had told him he had given me something to make me ill, so that I should be out of the way—but that couldn't be, because I had felt it coming on after the chill. He never put himself out, but only said, 'She is still delirious, I see,' and called a chambermaid (the same that I had spoken to just before) to take care of me. But I said, 'What has become of him? That child who lies dead, with the candles burning, isn't him and you know he isn't.' He said 'I will talk to you as much as you like about it, when you are better' (but he never did), and shut the door. It gave me such a turn to see how it was, and not knowing what to do, that I was taken worse, and wasn't out of danger for some days. All this time I didn't know what I was doing; and, no doubt, I talked about it all while I was light-headed, for I heard them speak about me when they thought I wasn't myself. But I was sensible then, and I had picked up enough of the language here, from that wicked servant of his, who (it's my belief) was at the bottom of it all, to make out what they said. I heard them say that I had gone off my head about the child's death, and was to be taken care of. I opened my eyes and told them that I must see the Marquis. They stared to find that I was right in my head, and said he had gone away. 'How am I to get home,' I said and I made them understand that I should write and expose him, if he didn't come soon or send some one to see after me. I don't know whether they let him know or not; but, four days after, he sent that good-for-nothing servant of his to say that he couldn't come, but had got me a very good place with his aunt. I said, 'I don't want to stay in Italy. I want to go home.' He said he was sorry, but couldn't help it, as he hadn't money enough with him to take me home, because his master expected to see me first. I had a hard matter to keep my tongue quiet; but I was driven into a corner, as you may say, and had to go. When we got to Florence he took me where I expected to find the Marquis; but they said it was where his aunt lived, the same that was staying at Freville Chase"—

"Yes; I can just remember her," said Everard. "She was a very good woman."

"The best I ever knew, my lord. I lived with her over seventeen years. I feel sure she was afraid there was some-

thing wrong, though she never said a word about it. I saw him afterwards, and he spoke very kindly, and made me a very handsome present, 'for the care I had taken of his nephew,' he said. I did long to throw it at him, only she was in the room. I often thought of going home; but then, what could I have done, with no one but myself to speak, and him and his servant to swear against me? So I stayed with her till she died, and I don't know that I should have come home then, if I hadn't been afraid of him. But, just after the funeral, I heard the servant tell somebody that I was wrong in the head and ought to be looked after. I knew from that what his master was up to again, and as I had let things out to one or two people who might tell again, I was afraid of being made out mad for saying what nobody would have believed. So I slipped off and came to England. But, just after I got home, who should I see but that villain Giacomo, creeping about disguised, just as he was afterwards in the lane."

"You are sure it was the same man?" said Elfrida.

"Yes, miss, I could swear to him. I suppose you heard what he did afterwards. If it hadn't been for my lord"—

"He wrote me word," said Everard, "that it was his servant who made the attempt in the lane, and said the man had done it on his own account. But when and where did you see him first?"

"Just out of Chase End, my lord, on the Lyneham road. It was the middle of last March. It gave me such a turn, knowing what he was and what he was afraid I should tell, that I ran home, and kept in all day 'till it got dusk; and then I put on a thick veil, and went down the Exbourne road, and up here through the Chase. I was too frightened to think what I was doing, but went right into the house, just before they locked up—of course I knew every hole and corner of it—and got into the tower. I hid there all night; but you were travelling abroad, my lord, at that time, and so I went off by daylight. I hung about the Chase 'till it was light, and then I walked on to the station and took the first train to Lyneham. I had meant to go to Sir Richard, and ask to be protected against him; but I was afraid of her ladyship, and, coming off in that way without my things (for of course I hadn't said where I was going) I had left my money behind, all but a shilling or two. There I was with-

out money, and nobody to speak for me, and nothing but the clothes I stood in. I didn't know what in the world to do, for I couldn't write home to get my things without my stepmother and the second family letting out where I was. The only thing I could think of was to apply to Sir Roger, as the last resource, because I could walk to Bramscote. So I set off as fast as I could walk ; but I didn't know my way, and was afraid to ask, for fear of being traced. I wandered about, hour after hour, on a bitter cold day, without food, till I thought I should have to lie down and die in one of those lonely lanes. At last I came to a house at the corner of four roads, and sat down on the step because I couldn't walk any further. I was perished with the cold, after being so long in Italy, and felt so faint that I could hardly see. I think I should have died then, only Mrs. Atherstone drove up to the door and took me in. It was very hard to deceive her by giving a false name, when she was so very kind, and did what no one could have been expected to do for a person she knew nothing of, and kept me there four months, and would have gone on, if I could have stayed. She only came there now and then, and I was expecting her again, and meant to tell her the truth and ask her advice, when I saw him—Giacomo—one day from the window, and he saw me. It was the beginning of August. That afternoon I slipped off unobserved and walked all the way here. I waited about in the Chase till dark, and then walked up to the house. I had got so that I didn't care what I did, but went right in again by the offices and up the back stairs. I heard one of them lock the door just after, and say, 'who was it that came in just now?' But I was out of sight then, and I ran up the back stairs and on to the tower, and hid myself till Mrs. Roland came to look around. I told her all, and begged hard to be allowed, for charity, to stay there till she could find a chance of getting me a situation right away. I remembered what you were, my lord, when you were only seven years old, and I felt sure you would give me shelter ; but I had been so shaken by all I had gone through, I couldn't bear to think of any one knowing about me just then but her, and I begged her to say nothing for a few days. And then the Marquis came on a visit here, and that put me about dreadfully, and I begged her to wait till he was out of the country. And then, the very day he went"—

"Yes, I found you there," said Everard. "You were quite unnerved, and no wonder. She told me all about it just afterwards. She acted wisely, as she always does. It would have been very awkward for me to have known it while he was in the house. I wonder how his man found out afterwards where you went to."

"From my father's second wife, my lord. I know the Marquis went round by Chase End, the morning he went away, and called at the shop, and spoke to her. I knew that from those who saw him."

"Clearly there was something serious to conceal," thought Everard, "or such very strong measures would not have been taken. It looks worse and worse."

"You are sure that the child you saw in the coffin had flaxen ringlets?" he said.

"Not ringlets, my lord. The hair was flaxen, but cut short, so that I could only just see it, covered as the head was. Did any one see him with ringlets?"

"Yes—Dr. Ranston, unless there were two children with flaxen hair."

"They were up to cutting them off, so as they might keep the hair out of sight, if they had any object in it," remarked Charlotte Wilcox, addressing no one in particular.

"Which there certainly would be," said Elfrida, "if they wanted to make out that he was your brother."

"Do you remember the dates?"

"We came there on the 21st of March, between six and seven in the evening," answered Charlotte Wilcox. "It was on my birthday, which is the 21st."

"I wrote the certificate five hours before," said Dr. Ranston, looking at his journal.

"Then that conclusively proves that the child whose death you certified was not my brother," said Everard, "and as to how your certificate came into our hands, I leave you to guess. The landlady says, in the evidence you read last week, that she missed the certificate, that she asked the other woman what had become of it, and that the woman said she had sold it for an English sovereign."

"It was he that paid it then," said Charlotte Wilcox; "for he brought some English money with him."

"One more question," said Everard. "Was my brother fair? I cannot distinctly remember."

"No, my lord. He had black eyes and hair. I had a coloured photograph of him, done in Paris, but it was stolen off my table at Alassio by some of them—the same, I suppose, that sold the certificate."

Everard rose from his chair and, walking a few paces away, stood still.

"What is it?" said Elfrida. "Does anything strike you?"

"Yes—but it may be nothing—I daresay it is nothing."

He was much excited, and spoke with a nervous energy that bordered on impatience.

"Tell me one thing more," he said, turning suddenly and addressing Charlotte Wilcox. "If he were alive now—I don't mean that he *is* alive, or likely to be—but suppose he were, and suppose you met him by chance. Do you think you would be able to know him again, at this distance of time, changed as he must be?"

"I think I should, my lord; for his features were more formed than children's generally are. But there is no chance of that. He was made away with by some of them, as sure as I am standing here."

Everard made no reply, but presently looked at his watch, listened as if expecting to hear some sort of sound, and went out of the room, leaving the door open. The distant echo of the great door bell was heard as he passed out, and at the same moment, or rather before, Elfrida changed colour perceptibly. In another minute he returned, and Hubert was with him.

Charlotte Wilcox, having told all she had to tell, and answered all the questions that Everard had to ask, prepared to leave the room on his return. She curtsied as he came in, and was beginning to back out, when he said:

"Wait a moment. Did you ever see *him* before?"

She looked up, grew pale by degrees, and trembled violently.

"It's your brother, my lord," she said. "I can swear to him against all the world. Whatever could they have done to him?"

"Passed him off of course as the other Hubert Freville, who had flaxen hair and light blue eyes and died at Alassio. The two nurses who had charge of that child have confessed and sworn that they got another instead of him, and the only

doubt was, 'Who could that other be?' You and Dr. Ranston's journal have shown who it was."

"I am ready to take my oath of it before any court in the world," she said. "But that isn't all. He ought to have a little scar on the right side of his head, above the ear, where it was cut open against the edge of a carved footstool in this very room. Mrs. Roland remembers its happening, for she was talking to me about it yesterday evening. And she said how like Mr. Freville was to your lordship, and that she should have said he must be him now, only we knew by the certificate he was dead. He wasn't two years old, but the hair never grew. You could always see the place, if you looked for it; and the doctor said it would never come there again."

Everard had in the meantime sent for Mrs. Roland, and she now came in.

"You remember Master Hubert cutting his head open against the footstool?" said Charlotte Wilcox.

"Yes I do—very well," answered Mrs. Roland, scrutinising Hubert's face closely.

"And suppose you found the scar *there*?"

"Suppose we look for it," said Dr. Ranston. "And, as I am a doctor," he added, inserting his fingers between the hair of Hubert's head, above the right ear, "and ought to know something about scars, I will be the examiner. Here it is, when you push the hair aside—a little bald place in a semi-circle. Look, Mrs. Roland. Do you know it?"

"I do, sir, and I can show you how it was made."

She went to the middle of the room, brought back a carved footstool, and held it up.

"You see, sir," she said, "this part is just the shape and size of the scar. He fell against this bit, and you find it discoloured all round, where the oak and the crimson satin was stained with blood. I always saw he was like my lord; but then I couldn't go against the certificate."

Everard drew her on one side and in a few words, explained the case.

"Dear me!" she said. "That accounts indeed for a great deal. It always puzzled me to think what that ill-looking woman came here for, last October, and went off grumbling in her own language."

"I only wish she were here now," thought Everard. "I

might put her upon tracing out the lost photograph for me."

"I wonder what that landlady has come for," said she, "and brought old Susan with her again."

"Is she here? Then do bring her in at once. I want to see her."

Off went Mrs. Roland. There was then a pause in the proceedings, and Hubert felt himself free to claim his own subjectivity.

"One hears of people gaining a loss," he said, "but I have gained by losing. I can hardly realise the truth yet—that I am *his* brother—hardly believe in myself."

"We are all pretty much in the same way about that, I think," said Dr. Ranston, turning to Elfrida. "I had half a mind to feel my own pulse just now, to see whether I could believe my own ears and eyes; for the truth seemed so much too good to be true. And yet I have always seen such a strong likeness between them—it was the same likeness that made me speak to him as a stranger in Rome, when I heard him inquiring for some lost friend or relation—and guessed it might be the man I had met in the train. The likeness was providential then: otherwise Lord de Freville would never have been traced at all, or not until it was too late."

"I always thought they were wonderfully alike," said Elfrida, "though the colouring is different; but—I don't know why—the likeness was never so evident as just now, when they came into the room together."

"He has developed somehow or other since he went away," thought Dr. Ranston. "That is why. If the time had not been so short, I should think he had gone through some sort of practical schooling."

He had indeed and it was going on still; but, unlike himself, he showed no sign of what was within him.

Mrs. Roland now reappeared followed by old Susan and the landlady of the White Hart. As soon as they had deployed into line, old Susan came to the front and spoke.

"Please my lord," she said, "my niece had to come and give a message from that nasty creature, and was that put about, because its no doubt all a pretence, as it couldn't be done, there was no doing nothing with her. And so I says—for I come with the carrier this morning to see how she was—I says, I'll take and go with you myself. I know

his lordship won't mind ; and he *must* be told, so as he can take the law on her if she's up to her games."

"Thank you, Susan," said Everard. "Is she in Lyneham or where she can be found?"

"No my lord," said the landlady ; "but she is coming in a few days. All she told me in the letter was, that she can't get at what is wanted, but sends this parcel, and will explain when she comes, what the meaning of it is."

Everard opened the parcel, and light came into his eyes "It explains itself," he said. "Here is the lost photograph with 'C. W.' at the back. Tell her that she shall be well paid for this. She is as bad a lot as I ever had to deal with—don't tell her that—but she has done, for her own advantage, all I could have wanted. The cock-and-bull story of an Italian prince and a stepmother was got up by some one—it doesn't signify who."

"I don't think, my lord, she had anything to do with that ; for she was in a great way at not being able to find out who he was, and kept on complaining that her cousin had been taken in about it by the man she was engaged to."

"Very likely. Well the child that was changed"—

"I beg your pardon, my lord, but I haven't told you what she said in her letter. She said that she had found her cousin at last, but that she was unable to tell her anything about it, and could not even tell where the man she had been engaged to was gone, as she had never seen him since. And then she remembered her cousin giving her this photograph at the time, when she first proposed to change the children, in order to show her what a beauty he was. So she went back to her own home to look for it, thinking there might be some name on the back that would help her to track who the child had belonged to. She found the portrait in an old trunk. But there was only 'C. W.' on it."

"Exactly," said Everard. "Here is the owner of it, Charlotte Wilcox. It is the photograph of my brother. There he is, and here is his photograph. It is somewhat roughly coloured, but the colouring is his."

"Well, to be sure !" exclaimed Susan. "It's him, as plain as can be."

"Is that the likeness of your brother, my lord," said the landlady, "him that we thought was dead?"

"Yes. Here is his nurse, who can swear to it."

"That I can," said Charlotte Wilcox, as he handed the photograph to her. "It's my very own—and there's my writing at the back."

"Why, lor! if it ain't Miss Davies.—Well, I never!" interrupted Susan. "Whatever was you a-thinking of, to run off like that? You needn't have been afraid of the ragamuffin, though Muggles had ought to have took him up. He went about his business pretty quick when I showed him the old blunderbuss."

"You shall hear all about that, Susan, before you go," said Mrs. Roland, looking at the photograph. "This is exactly Master Hubert, as he was at three years old."

"And is distinctly like him now," said Dr. Ranston. "The features there are extraordinarily marked for those of a child, and they are very little altered, considering the difference of age."

"It's just like what he was when he was taken abroad," remarked Mrs. Roland.

"I can swear to that," added Charlotte Wilcox.

The landlady, having fulfilled the end of her visit, began to go away.

"Do you remember me?" said Dr. Ranston, as she sidled past him.

"Yes, sir, indeed I do," said she, turning very red. "It isn't likely I should forget that day, with all that's come of it."

"I'm sure you won't, Eliza, to your dying day," chimed in old Susan.

"That will do," added Mrs. Roland, leading the way out.

Sir Richard, who had ridden to Netherwood, was expected about this time, and Elfrida, wishing to spare Everard any further explanations, went out to meet him. Dr. Ranston had letters to write, and went to write them. Everard and Hubert remained in the gallery.

"There is no measuring the length and breadth and depth of one's own deficiencies, anyhow," said Everard, throwing himself back in an arm-chair. "It really is unaccountable that I should never have suspected the truth till it was forced on my attention, by what Charlotte Wilcox told me just before you came. I suppose the grumbling old dictum, 'too good to be true,' was at the bottom of it, hidden up among other unrecognised fallacies."

"And yet you were the first to see it, and to put two and two together," said Hubert, "and you always would have it that I was a Freville, in spite of everything and everybody. It was, of course, the existence of the certificate that put you off the scent, as it did every one else. But if you come to ask, 'Why did nobody suspect the truth?'—Why didn't I, when I was puzzling myself over dim recollections of this house."

"How was it you didn't mention them?"

"Because they were so misty they didn't seem real."

"Well, I suppose we were not meant to see it before it was made clear. The sun burst out all at once, and brought the greatest possible good, of its kind, that could come to me, out of this greatest evil. I had a bad time of it after you went; for there came another letter the next day from a different place."

"From the Italian woman? Well, I was going to say that I examined mine after I had begun to suspect, and found no Calabrian postmark at all. You were right, and Ranston was wrong. Of course you were, and you saved me, just in time, from I don't know what. I was stepping on board the steamer at Marseilles when John caught me up. There was a fellow dogging me all the way from Paris to Marseilles, and from the hotel there to the steamer, and from the steamer back to the station. I can see who sent him, and why. It had been discovered who I was not, and by the help of Charlotte Wilcox, there was every chance of my discovering who I was. It was time for him to do something; and his antecedents tell one what he was likely to do."

"Did you see Lady Dytchley in Paris," said Everard.

"Yes. Do you think she had anything to do with sending the man to dog me?" answered Hubert.

"Not directly, I suppose; but I don't know. What made you ask the question? Did she say anything that would lead you to infer it?"

"Not at all. She was very open in her manner."

"Then what put it into your head to ask the question?"

"Well, you know she was against the marriage, when I was supposed to have no name."

"Yes: but how did she show it? What did she say to you? I am sure she said something disagreeable, that you

wish to hide from me because it is so. I can see it in your manner and in your way of speaking. You are not as you would naturally be, at such a time as this. There is a constraint about you that you can't shake off, and you have partly infected me. What did she say to you? Out with it now?

"I must entreat you not to press that question," said Hubert solemnly. "I would do anything in the world for you that can be done, and I think you know it; but there are things that can't be repeated."

"I know there are," answered Everard, "and I know that this is not one of them. You don't repeat it, because you think it would be painful for me to hear. But shirking what is before one never answers. I see that I must help you to the answer. Didn't she say something to the effect that Elfrida didn't care about you?"

"Yes, that was it. Now you have heard it, and we can talk of something more agreeable."

"Not yet. There is more behind. You half believed it—didn't you?"

"Well, it wasn't a pleasant idea to carry with me into Calabria," said Hubert, making a desperate effort to look amused.

"It wouldn't have disturbed you, if you hadn't believed it: but you did believe it. I saw there was something wrong, by your manner to Elfrida. I don't think she saw it—luckily for you she went out in a hurry to get the story over with Sir Richard. But she *will* see it if you don't mind, and she is not at all the sort of girl to bear it without an explanation that would be very painful, to say the least, for both of you. The thing must be cleared up now, or you will get into trouble. What did Lady Dytechley say?"

"Well, you know, I can't recollect exactly what she said; but it was just as you supposed. You can imagine how she spoke and how she looked."

"Yes, and I know how she can make herself believe what she happens to wish at the time being. She wanted to break off your marriage—we know why—and she threw it on me, didn't she?—But I know that she did. I know her so well. I know how she would make it out to herself, as putting things to rights and making them much better than they would have been. I have told you the upshot of what

she said. You must tell me how she put it, and tell it quickly, that I may have done with it."

"It really is done now, through your second sight, or rather second hearing. You expressed the whole thing when you said 'put to rights, and making it much better.'"

"Yes—but how? Why would it be much better, according to her view? I am certain she gave a reason. Did she say anything, for instance, about my rides with Elfrida at Netherwood last autumn? and didn't she lead you to infer that we—Don't force me to go on, but tell me the rest."

"I will, then. She said that you had always been suited to each other, that both would have felt it so but for your engagement, that it was the surest means of restoring your health, and that, if I were out of the way, so it would be."

"So she actually went as far as that?"

"She did, and appeared to be firmly convinced of it."

"I daresay. Her power of self-deception is unequalled. And you really believed it?"

"What could I do, after such positive and solemn assurances from a person who had every means of knowing. I left Paris, meaning to keep away and write afterwards to Elfrida to say why I did so."

"Hubert, you are a noble fellow as ever lived," said Everard, rising to his feet suddenly. "A more heroic effort was never made. But really, if I had not known her so long, and unhappily so well, I should think that she had gone out of her senses. I thought I had been sufficiently intelligible to her in the library at Netherwood, when she was trying to show that black was white about going abroad: but it seems not. The habit of drawing on her wishes for her facts must have developed enormously by encouragement from within and from without. A more absurdly improbable idea never was entertained by a sane person. She knew better than anyone how little I had seen of Elfrida till then, for she had purposely kept her out of my way, on account of my religion. She knew what we were talking about then, for she said so in a letter to Elfrida. She knew that you possess the whole of Elfrida's heart, for Sir Richard told me in Paris that she said so, and that she was then delighted at it, as she will be again. She knew that for Ida I raced like a madman across country, travelled afterwards in a thin, icy-damp clothes to Rome, and nearly killed one man, if not two, when I got there.

She knew all this, and yet she could talk of a fresh combination, to suit the present state of her game, just as if Elfrida and myself were chess-men on a board. Were it not for her extraordinary power of deceiving herself, I should be obliged to say that a more reckless and cruel falsification of facts could hardly be conceived. Certainly the consequences might have been ruinous to us all, and would, if Ranston's letter had not caught you at Marseilles. It would have broken up your life and Elfrida's, embittered the last days of mine, and stamped out the race. The time has come for speaking out as I have never spoken before, as I never expected to speak, and as I hope never to speak again. Silence now would have no charity in it, but only humbug. Lady Dytchley had a long interview in Paris with the man who has a vested interest hostile to what Charlotte Wilcox was sure to show sooner or later. She had an interest of her own (as you know) in breaking off your marriage. The next week she worked on your feelings till she made you play into her hands. Will anyone tell me that there was no connection between those two interviews and the man who dogged you from Paris to the steamer at Marseilles, and from the steamer to the station? The thing was managed by hints and complaints. Neither of them meant to do you any harm—that is, as they would make themselves understand the word—but they wanted you out of the way, more out of the way than they could have securely reckoned on your putting yourself. The man Giacomo, who tried to capture Charlotte Wilcox and squealed when I gave him a good kick for his trouble, was of course the discretionary medium, and the man who dogged you was his agent, who would, no doubt, have introduced himself plausibly, and misled you half over the world in search of what had no existence. And you would have gone, for the sake of the excitement and the distraction, in the vain hope of crushing out what you couldn't drive away. But there are things that can't be crushed out, and this is one of them. You would have pressed it down with your will, but the will cannot silence the memory; and as the rebellion of memory is liable to be mistaken for a defect in the will, your heroic victory over yourself would have been, to yourself, almost as bad as a defeat, by reason of unmanageable scruples. You would have broken your heart over it without the comfort of

being satisfied with what you had done. My own case is simpler, beyond comparison, than yours would have been, for I have only to obey the law of God ; and yet I tell you that the struggle with my own nature, and with the morbid side of my own conscience has passed all conception. I leave you to judge, then, what Lady Dytechley would have brought on you, if you had not been stopped in time."

"I saw what she was bringing on me," said Hubert, "and I have known her ways as long as I have known her. But she had the advantage of me that time ; for there was truth and justice in her cause, though she advocated it on false principles."

"Truth based on its own suppression," said Everard, "and justice on wrong. Make every fair excuse for her, but don't forget that black is not white."

"I don't forget it, and I am afraid I make much less allowance than you do. The truth and justice I speak of are in the case itself, not in her use of it."

"In other words, one wrong could be undone by another, that other being intolerable to the person for whose benefit it was done. I see how it is. You still think that, if you had never been, I might have. . . . My dear Hubert, you really are the noblest fellow that I ever knew, or heard of, or imagined. It really is enough to bring tears out of a stone. But you have been deceived, grossly and cruelly, deceived by the old device of setting the heart in opposition to the intelligence and turning a noble nature against itself. I have said enough to convince anyone, however strongly biassed ; but the conjuring trick has taken such firm hold of your imagination that assurances are useless. I must go further. I must probe an ever-open wound, that you may know what is there, and be at peace. What I said about Elfrida, in reference to Lady Dytechley's plan, excludes the idea universally, excludes all women existing and possible. Let no one talk to me of other hopes, of a new beginning. I would not marry now, under any circumstances whatever. I don't mean to imply a principle for others—far from it. My case is altogether exceptional. She was, as it were, made for me, and I for her. Our engagement was a part of our life. We did not begin it, yet it was our own spontaneous act. We made it ours naturally, yet without ever supposing that it might not have been. We were betrayed : and when she

lost confidence in me, it was broken through its own completeness, that offered her all or nothing. It was broken, and my heart has broken with it. When I die, my death will not have been caused by what I went through to reach her at Rome, but simply by the fact that I saw her there as *his* wife. I have tried to bear it. I have tried to resign myself to it. I have tried to live through it for your sake. But the blow struck home. My life is one of suffering, and must be, while it lasts ; yet I pray continually that it may last, if I can only see her return to the Faith. She was robbed of it in her infancy, cheated out of it on the very threshold since, and is, as you well know, in the worst possible position for recovering it. I pray for that, hope for that, suffer for that. I am ready to suffer for it to any extent, with every possible aggravation of bitterness, and for any time. I have said enough, I think, to show that Lady Dytchley's project of restitution is hardly tenable. Are you satisfied now ? ”

“ I am convinced,” said Hubert, “ but how can I be satisfied after what you have just said ? Imagine yourself at the entrance of a fairy palace, with the greatest earthly happiness awaiting you there, yet seeing—not merely your brother, but your dearest friend, starving and perishing in the snow outside. Imagine that, and you will have a very faint idea, a very incomplete symbol of what I feel.”

Everard took his arm gently and moved away towards the door.

“ That would be the sensational view of it,” he said, “ but not the true one. We don't see the reason, nor the end, nor the balance of things, nor the consequences growing side by side out of them. We know so little, so very little. Now go to Elfrida. Show yourself to her as you are, not as what Lady Dytchley would have turned you into. Remember nothing at all that we have said, except that she is yours.”

He opened the door decisively, and Hubert went out in search of Elfrida





CHAPTER XXXIX.



BEFORE ten o'clock in the morning every old woman in Chase End had heard the news and made her remarks on the fact. "*Where they do agree, their unanimity is wonderful*," and it was so then, partly because they knew something of Hubert and liked what they knew, partly because they knew nothing of the Marquis Moncalvo, and disliked what they imagined. The darkness visible that hung round him enlarged their suspicions and passing strange were the stories that went forth about him, in connection with the news just heard.

There was rejoicing at Freville Chase, heart-felt, yet subdued, like a toast that is drunk in solemn silence. Mrs. Roland had made known the fact in a parenthetical way to the household, as a thing that must of necessity be, and they felt with her that comments would be out of place; but Anne, the housemaid, was always irrepressible where the Marquis was concerned, and she pursued Mrs. Roland half way through the house to have the last word about him.

"Seeing's believing," said she, as if to herself. "I kep' on telling everybody he had ought to be took up—a nasty wicked creature, to go and murder his own sister's child!"

"When the child has grown up to be a man, and you saw him this very morning," remarked Mrs. Roland, retiring with dignity.

"He took and sold him to them as was ready to do it," said Anne, "and it wasn't his fault if they was afraid of being hanged. He'll have to be took up some day—you see if he won't."

"I only wish you'd had the power as well as the will," thought Mrs. Roland, "to have put him under lock and key six months ago."

"I wish Everard had mounted him on Thunderbolt and got his neck broken," said Sir Richard, at or about the same time, to Elfrida, as they were walking in the Chase a little way from the house. "But it was all my fault, for minding the sparks flying upwards and all that, and never would have come to that, if I had gone to my duties properly and thought of you and Ida. I tell you what it is:—Take warning by me, and never get careless about your religion. But you won't, I know. Pray for me—that's more to the point, for I want it, after all the mischief I've done. Now, look here! This is what I got this morning from Paris. Not coming home till the end of May—the old story. I don't care. It shall be directly—next week. You can get the toggery afterwards. One of Ida's ball dresses would do to be married in—they're white, you know—and I can get the orange flowers out of the orangery at home. Can't you manage it so?"

"I could very well," said Elfrida, "and would just as soon be married in a ball dress of Ida's as not; but I feel sure that you will not insist on it's being hurried over before the time. Most likely my mother will come back sooner, as circumstances have changed. All will go smoothly when she gets my letter to-morrow; and if not, the time is not much. I am sure you would not wish me to be married in her absence, for the sake of a month."

"Quite right, quite right," answered Sir Richard. "You've got a wise head. I don't know how I shall get on without you, I'm sure I don't. You see I made such a terrible mess of it before, that I thought I must come out strong. Who can that be, in pink and tops, riding up the avenue? Why Sherborne coming to call, on his way to Quarry Wood: They meet there to-day."

Sherborne trotted up to them and dismounted. "I heard you were here," he said. "How is he?"

"Do go in and see him," answered Elfrida. "I want to know what you think, and yet I dread hearing it."

"Quite a different man from what he was six weeks ago," interposed Sir Richard, whose depressed optimism was beginning to recover itself. "What do you think he has

just found out? Why, that Hubert is his brother who died at Alassio eighteen years ago—only he didn't die, but got out of the way, you know."

"I *am* glad to hear that. I don't know when I have heard news that gave me so much pleasure to hear. But how did a child of three years old manage to get out of the way?"

"Well, they did it for him. It was a very awkward business. That fellow, you know—he was his guardian. A bad business as ever was. I am sure I don't know how it can be kept quiet."

"I will tell you about it before I go," said Elfrida in a low voice: "but you can guess who *he* is."

"Yes, I can. By the by, I met him in London the day before yesterday."

"Where? It might be important to know."

"He was coming out of Claridge's; but whether he was staying there, or calling, I don't know."

"Let me take your horse, and you go in with Elfrida and see him," said Sir Richard.

Sherborne followed Elfrida, who, as they walked slowly up the courtyard, gave a rapid epitome of what had come out through Charlotte Wilcox and the photograph. They found Everard in the gallery.

"I have told him all about it," said Elfrida.

"And better news I never heard," added Sherborne.

"How is Mrs. Atherstone?" said Everard. "I should like so much to see her. Tell her from me that we owe it to her. The woman she saved from perishing with cold and hunger was the same that gave the information. I must ask you to keep the circumstances quiet among yourselves (including Sir Roger, De Beaufoy, and Lady Fyfield) because I want, for evident reasons, to get the matter settled quietly."

"You said last night you wanted to know where *he* is, and Mr Sherborne saw him in London coming out of Claridge's," said Elfrida to Everard in a low voice.

Sherborne stayed a few minutes, and then went away. She followed him out of the room and looked up nervously without speaking.

"I think you are a better judge than I can be," said Sherborne, "for you can compare what he is now with what

he was a short time ago. Any change for the better, since he came back, must be a good sign; and there has evidently been that, by what he says himself."

"And he *is* a lot better—there's no doubt about it," put in Sir Richard from behind. "So you're off. I hope you will have a good day; but it's a nasty country over there."

"And further than I care to go," answered Sherborne. "I should never have thought of it, only I wanted an excuse for calling here early. He was out riding when I came last."

In the meanwhile Everard had gone into the library, where Dr. Ranston was writing letters.

"I really must go to London now," he said. "You will see that I must, when I tell you why."

"I don't think my vision will extend so far as that," answered Dr. Ranston. "But what is it?"

"It is that I have to settle this business with the author of it, who (I have just heard) is in London. It must be done, or the succession will not be safe; and there are only two ways of doing it. I must either get his acknowledgement of the fraud in some way quietly, the lawyers will know how—or else let it come to a public trial, which, of course, I will not do, if I can avoid it by any lawful means."

"I have been thinking of that," said Dr. Ranston, "and I can only say that, if you will accept my services, I am ready to see him myself. I must be up in town to-night. You are not fit to go; and if you were, how could you, in justice to yourself? I am the man to deal with him, if he should be refractory; for I am able to come down upon him with evidence out of his own mouth. I can say, 'You thanked me for attending your nephew and certifying his death, and I can prove by my own journal and the nurse's evidence that he was alive and well five hours afterwards. My journal proves that the child I attended was fair, and I can prove by the evidence of the same nurse and by a photograph belonging to her that your nephew was dark. Moreover, I have just seen and recognised and been recognised by the woman who was the nurse of the child that really died, and I can produce the Italian woman through whom your servant Giacomo effected the exchange. The one is ready to give her evidence: the other has already done so. Therefore, if you have any regard for your reputa-

tion, you will accept the very easy terms that are offered through the generosity of a man whose name I ought not to pollute by pronouncing in your presence. If not, the case will come to a public trial, with what result you know as well as I do.' That will settle him if he is refractory : but he will not attempt it, for he hasn't a leg to stand on."

"You certainly are a friend in need," said Everard. "There is no proportion between this offer of yours and anything I can say to thank you for it. Sherborne told Elfrida just now that he saw him come out of Claridge's, the day before yesterday. I don't know whether he is staying there, or even whether he is still in London."

"I hope he is : but I must find him."

"Yes, but you can't go after him to Paris, where it seems, he is generally to be found."

"I can, and I will, too, for your sake, if necessary. I will find him, by hook or by crook, wherever he is. But he must come to London, if he is not there. If I can neither find him in London nor in Paris, a judicious letter will bring him. By the by, your lawyer had better be with me. If you will give me a letter to him, I will be at his office to-morrow morning, as soon as it opens, and we can go together."

"I will. But a word first about the terms. You see, Hubert inherited from his mother a considerable sum of money which, on his fictitious death, went—where it went. Of course Hubert is entitled by law and justice to claim this money, with all arrears ; but I can answer for his not doing so. You had better hear what he says before you go, that you may be able to say you have : but, in the meantime, I can tell you what he will do. He will make it over to him by a deed of gift. For every reason I wish it to be so, and I am sure Hubert will. That relieves him from refunding ; and his private acknowledgement of the fraud will save him from a public exposure. On the other hand, the fact of Hubert's newly discovered identity cannot be explained away, for it necessarily implies its own previous suppression ; but the scandal must and shall be prevented, as far as possible. I have every reason for that. And I *will* prevent it by, laying the blame (before the world) on a volunteer agent who shall be called by courtesy unknown. This I am able to do, because Charlotte Wilcox told me she had good reason for believing that his rascally servant invented the

plot and carried it out. I have a right to make use of that belief, and I think the terms altogether may be called easy."

"They are indeed," said Dr. Ranston, beginning to seal a letter. "I don't think I could have brought myself to let him off so cheap."

CHAPTER XI.



LADY Dytchley, having just read Elfrida's letter, was considering its contents, balancing the losses and gains of her diplomacy, and reviewing the whole question as it then stood. With regard to the first subject of meditation she had no doubt at all. Clearly it was better that Hubert should be Everard's heir than have gone back to Elfrida at Freville Chase without a name. But the losses and gains were questionable, especially the gains. Ida had made a good marriage, but circumstances rendered it practically worse than a bad one. Hubert was indeed heir presumptive to all and more than all that he had lost: but suppose Everard were to marry, after all! "Oh! if he had married Ida," she thought, "Hubert might have married Elfrida, whose fortune would have made it prudent, as well as unworldly, and so nice altogether."

Colouring with vexation, wincing under a sudden twinge of remorse, akin to the sensation produced by the first plunge of a vessel into the trough of the sea, she passed on to the third subject, the whole question, but only to find there a larger and clearer view of the losses gained and the gains lost.

St. Paul's exhortation to bear one another's burdens, is oftener inculcated than obeyed, particularly where blame attaches; and so it was now.

Lady Dytchley did not feel at all inclined to be responsible in any degree for the Marquis Moncalvo, but considered that she was entitled by every law divine and

human to make him responsible for herself. Of course he should. What had he done with the letters? and why did he follow them to Rome? and why did he keep back Sir Richard's telegram, that would have stopped all the mischief? And then to have passed his own nephew off as somebody else, and eighteen years afterwards let him seem to be nobody, and when he was trying to be somebody try to entice him off nowhere!

While she was exciting herself with these reflections, the Marquis unexpectedly appeared. She refrained from all manifestations till the courier was on the further side of the door, which he had shut delicately, and then she looked at him. There was an angry smile on her lips and a light of evil omen in her eyes.

"To what new fatality," she said, "do I owe the surprise of this visit?"

"To none that I am aware of," answered the Marquis, feeling much interior discomfort and concealing much of it by the force of a fine manner. "Your wishes are disappointed for the present, owing to a letter from Freville Chase—a servant was sent to Marseilles with it. But under existing circumstances the journey cannot be given up, nor even postponed more than a few days."

Lady Dytechley's eyes glowed and grew, seeming to approach nearer and nearer to him, like the lamps of an omnibus coming on slowly through a London fog.

"I ought *not* to be surprised at anything," said she, "after what I have known of you; but I was hardly prepared for this. I was hardly prepared to see you come and apologise for not being able to deceive your own nephew any longer."

The Marquis, notwithstanding his known courage and varied powers, felt an almost uncontrollable desire to run away; but feeling again, for the fourth time during the last four months, that he must *Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n*, he said:—

"If you will do me the favour of examining your memory you will find that the idea of persuading Mr. Hubert Freville to be at a distance from Miss Dytechley, by lengthening the search for his parentage, originated in your own mind—and ended there. You proposed it to me. You suggested that I should entice him on board a ship bound for Australia.

You became very angry when I refused to do so. You said that you would hear no more, and you shut the door in my face."

"I didn't shut the door in your face. I said I was tired and ill, and so I was—quite worn out, after sitting here for three-quarters of an hour listening to you, and seeing you try to make out that you had done nothing, after deceiving poor dear Ida, and killing Everard by it, and trying to kill Hubert—*your own nephew*—in a duel, and bring scandal and shame and disgrace and everything else on us all. And now you actually have the face to pretend that you don't know who Hubert is, when it has all been confessed and proved, and the woman you employed to swear that he died has told the whole story, and the other woman too, and Charlotte Wilcox has recognised him, and shown a photograph that she had done of him in Paris, which is as like him now as it can stare, and the other woman says that the man who came in disguise to the White Hart at Lyneham and tried to carry off Charlotte Wilcox (who recognised him then as your servant) was the same that brought Hubert to her to be passed off as old Lord de Freville's nephew. And then, when it was found out, years after, you let him be taken for the son of nobody-knows-who, to screen yourself, though he was engaged to be married, and it was ruining his chances, and making everybody believe he was the nephew of the nursery-maid, and worrying Everard to death when he was getting better in spite of you, so that he has hardly a chance now. And because I was, of course, anxious that Hubert should be out of the worry and mortification of all this till he had made things right according to the story that your accomplice, the nursery-maid, had told, you insinuate that I wanted you to entice him by false promises on board an Australian ship, to be wrecked, or burnt at sea, or murdered by bushrangers."

"I have never insinuated anything of the kind," said the Marquis: "but you certainly expressed a very strong desire that he should be led on by promises of evidence to Australia or South America. You forget that, and you forget what your reason was. You told me that you wished him to be out of the way because you wished Miss Dytechley to marry Lord de Freville, instead of him."

"When the time was fixed for her wedding, and I was

staying on in Paris, at great inconvenience, to get her trousseau!" said Lady Dytchley, in a sarcastic tone tempered by uneasiness. "Some people seem to think they can say anything of one, if there is no witness to contradict it."

"They do, indeed," said he with emphasis.

"Yes they do. You had better not try to make out it was me. Your character is too well known for that, particularly now that people know how you got rid of him when he was three years old. They are talking about it in every direction, I can tell you; and the only thing you can do is to go and acknowledge it, and beg his pardon and Charlotte Wilcox's. If you don't you will be sent to the Isle of Portland, and have to work with a chain round your leg. You *may* get off, if you are very quick about it. I am sure I hope you will, and repent of your evil deeds. But if your priests are worth anything, they will make you stand in a white sheet and confess the whole thing before the whole family on all sides, and before Charlotte Wilcox, and before all the villagers at Chase End"—

"Where every one knows whose husband I am," added the Marquis, beginning to retreat. "In your hatred to me you forget that."

"What has that to do with it?" interrupted Lady Dytchley, rising in pursuit. "Isn't it enough to have behaved to her as you have, and stolen letters and telegrams to do it, and made her miserable for life, and brought disgrace on her and all belonging to her, and killed behind his back the man she was engaged to and loved as much as she hates you. And Dr. Ranston has proved that the child whose death he certified was not like Hubert at all, but had flaxen hair and light blue eyes, and that you called on him, all the same at Florence, to thank him for attending your nephew, and sent the certificate of his death, which you had bought from the nurserymaid, to Sir Richard—for there it is now at Freville Chase—when he was all the time alive and well, and packed him off to Beynham as the nephew that died. Don't talk to me."

But the Marquis had no intention of talking. Truth and its opposite had been so curiously blended, and the latter was so unimportant by comparison, that the contest was hopeless, and when she brought up Dr. Ranston's

recollections against him he disappeared without warning or farewell, but had not gone far down the stairs when Dr. Ranston himself began to ascend them. They met half-way. The doctor recognised him instantly, raised his hat, and said :—

“ I think I have the honour of addressing the Marquis Moncalvo. May I speak to you for a few minutes? I have something to communicate that will be for your advantage to hear. My rooms are close by, in this hotel.”

The Marquis dimly recognised an old acquaintance, half remembered and quite inopportune. “ I really am so much engaged at this moment,” he said, continuing to descend.

But the doctor descended too, and planting himself in the way, said in a voice that could be heard for some distance around, “ I will not detain you long ; but my business is of such importance that I must speak to you here, if you will not come to my room. I have travelled from England on purpose, and I shall not return till I have said what I came to say. If you have any regard for your own reputation, you will not hesitate.”

As he said this purposely in French, and there were ears within earshot, the Marquis had no alternative. Dr. Ranston led the way into his own sitting-room, and shutting the door, stood with his back to it. At the same time the door of the next room was opened, and the lawyer who had come from London walked in.

“ You asked me to come here, that no one should overhear us, I believe,” said the Marquis haughtily. “ What is the meaning of this? Do you suppose that I shall let you have a witness, when I have none? How do I know who you are, or what is your object?”

“ You may have as many witnesses as you like,” said Dr. Ranston ; “ but I think you will prefer not having them. I am acting for Lord de Freville, in reference to his brother, your nephew ; and this is his lawyer. We have come to save your reputation, if you are willing. If not, the law must take its course, and I need hardly tell you what the result of that will be.”

“ What guarantee have I that this is not a conspiracy?” said the Marquis. “ I am not acquainted with either of you.”

“ My friend is a stranger to you, I know,” answered the doctor ; “ but you are not unacquainted with me. Do you

remember calling on me in Florence, eighteen years ago, to thank me for attending your nephew, Hubert Freville, at Allassio, and giving a certificate of his death?"

"Very likely I did. I really cannot undertake to remember the face of a man whom I saw once, for five minutes, eighteen years ago. You might have told me that on the staircase. Have the goodness to let me pass."

"With your good permission, not yet. The child I attended was the nephew and heir of the late Lord de Freville. The certificate was bought for you from the nurserymaid—you best know by whom—and you sent it to Sir Richard Dytchley as certifying the death of your nephew, who was then passed off as the other child whom I saw dead. A short time ago, as you must be aware, the woman who sold the certificate confessed the fraud, and her evidence, together with that of the head nurse, who now keeps the White Hart at Lyneham, was taken. This deprived your nephew not only of the position that he had always supposed to be his, but even of a name, and the family was therefore in imminent danger of extinction; but the present Lord de Freville is not a man to be baffled by anything that manhood can face or intellect penetrate. He has discovered and proved that the man who was thought to be the late Lord de Freville's nephew is his own brother, who was supposed to have died at Allassio. He has discovered and proved what I am unwilling to characterise. Charlotte Wilcox, the other two women, my own journal, a photograph of his brother, and a miniature of the child who died, have placed the facts beyond question. It remains for you to say whether you will enable Lord de Freville to take the necessary steps quietly, or whether you will compel him to prosecute. But before you decide"——

"Do your worst," interrupted the Marquis. "Everyone will know why Lord de Freville has done this. Tell him that I fight with a gentleman's weapons, not with paid witnesses and pretended journals and lawyers hidden behind folding-doors. Do what you like, all of you. I have listened long enough, and too long. If he wishes to attack me, let him do it like a man. Let me pass, or I shall be obliged to make a way for myself."

"If you deliberately prefer to have your conduct exposed in an open court of law," said Dr. Ranston, "be it so: but

before you take that irrevocable step, suppose you listen to what Lord de Freville in his extreme generosity proposes, with the full concurrence of his brother. He offers, not only to have it arranged quietly and give out that the fraud was perpetrated by some unauthorised agent, which he has reasons for believing to be so far true, but also to leave you in possession of the money you inherited on his brother's fictitious death. I need not remind you what the loss of so considerable a sum, with arrears and interest, would be. He and his brother will give up the whole to you by a deed of gift and save your character from utter ruin, if you will simply do an act of bare restitution to your own sister's son, which the law will do for you in a very different way if you refuse. He gives you the opportunity of making the restitution your own act, without any loss of any kind, when he has the right as well as the power, to crush you by enforcing it. The man who offers this is the man whom you have injured beyond all possible redress. You have destroyed his happiness and shortened his life by means that I need not remind you of. You know them, and I know them. Yet now, when you are in his power, and justice claims for him her bare rights against you, he asks as a favour that you will allow him to save you from yourself."

"May I speak to you for a moment alone?" said the Marquis, in a low voice, hoarse and scarcely articulate.

He followed Dr. Ranston into the next room, and held out his hand.

"Tell him," he said, "that I am at his disposal—that I will do everything he wishes because he wishes it. Tell him that I am the most miserable of men—that my life is a slow torture, so intolerable that, if there were not still in me some remains of the Faith I have been driven to neglect, I should have ended it with my own hands long ago. The injury he has received from me is one that only a saint could forgive. I deserve the bitterest hatred and contempt: he has shown the most sublime generosity. You have disarmed me. I was prepared to defy all the world. I am ready to humble myself for his sake before it. For this I have to thank you. Tell him one thing more from me, if you please. Tell him that I was not always what I am now, and still less what I seem to be. Circumstances that I might have controuled, but did not make, have led me to be as I am, and seem as

I seem, and bring sorrow or misfortunes, against my natural will, on all whose interest and happiness I naturally desired to promote. Tell him, too, that his charitable judgment is correct. I will not say who was the author of what was done at Alassio : but I was not. I can say no more, unless it were to him, and that may not be. I shall go to London immediately, and if you will tell me where to find the lawyer, I will call on him without delay, that he may be able to take the necessary steps as soon as possible."

Dr. Ranston wrote the name and address on a card, and the Marquis left the room by another door.

CHAPTER XLI.



HE Marquis Moncalvo set out for London by the first available train. A few hours after his arrival he called on Everard's lawyer, who, with the least possible delay, proceeded to take all necessary measures for concluding as soon as possible the delicate business entrusted to his care.

Sir Richard and Elfrida remained at Freville Chase, by Everard's desire, until the time approached for the wedding.

Lady Dytechley, though satisfied with the remedial turn that events had taken, was of opinion that, viewing matters as they stood in reference to herself, it would still be advisable for her to stay in Paris till the end of May. When she set out, her object was to leave a very small interval between the return to Netherwood and the duty of dressing for the dinner-party at Bramscote. The train was equal to the occasion, and fitted in so well that it would just bring her home in time to dress with becoming care.

Between half-past two and a quarter to three on that afternoon, Sherborne, who had come to Lyneham for the purpose of administering justice on such evil-doers as might be brought before the bench of magistrates, walked into number one sitting-room at the White Hart, with a view to

regaling himself on bread-and-cheese before riding back to Hazeley by circuitous ways. It happened that Dr. Ranston walked into the same room at the same time, but not with the same view. He had come to meet an express train, and having missed it by mistaking the hour, had strolled into the town. While looking at the prints in the bookseller's window he fell in with Sherborne, and they went into the White Hart together.

"What brings you to Lyneham to-day?" said Sherborne.

"I came from Freville Chase to catch the express," answered Dr. Ranston, "and missed it by my own fault; so that I shall have the pleasure of waiting two hours, and losing about four, and dining at ten o'clock."

"How is Lord de Freville?" asked Sherborne.

"Wonderfully well, circumstances considered, and temperament, and all that makes him what he is. But I wish he were not going to dine at Bramscote to-day. I wanted to stay, and see how he got through it. I came to Freville Chase yesterday, to see how he was, and I should have remained over to-morrow, if he had not assured me that he had rather meet Lady Dytechley at a dinner party, than have her call at Freville Chase and begin a long story, that he could neither refuse to hear nor believe if he heard it. I suppose you will be there? Do keep an eye on her, and interrupt them if they should happen to get into conversation.

"You may rely upon it that I will. But tell me. Had he any infectious fever in Rome?"

"Certainly not."

"I thought not: but Lady Dytechley told my sister-in-law, the other day in Paris, that he was sent out of the hotel on that account and became dangerously ill in consequence."

"Upon my word now! Did she say that? There is just this much of truth in it, that he was sent out of the hotel through a mistake and was, of course, in greater danger from not being attended to. But it made little or no difference in the long run. The mischief had been done before—you know how and when. Of course one can see why she set it about. She really is what I have heard ladies call a dreadful woman."

"Yes. I always thought so. She has perfected the art of making her opinions agree with her wishes. Miss Dytechley told me about your seeing the Marquis Moncalvo

in Paris two months ago. What did you think of him?"

"That he was a man born for better things. What he has done admits of no excuse, on any pretext whatever; but he showed feeling then, and I have no reason to suppose that it was put on."

"I am glad to hear it. He has had enough to sober him. I strongly suspect, from what my sister-in-law tells me, that his wife has scarcely spoken to him since the tragic scene in Rome. By the by, she is expected at Netherwood for the wedding, which is to take place next week."

"Is she? I hope there is no chance of her meeting Lord de Freville at Bramscote."

"No, indeed. She is not expected till to-morrow. But anyhow, Sir Roger is bothered enough at having been let in to ask Lady Dytchley."

"Are you quite sure that, if she were to come sooner, Lady Dytchley would not take her to dine there, instead of her sister, under the delusion of making out her own case by showing that they could meet as if nothing had happened?"

"I am sure she wouldn't. She is too sharp to run risks just now. She only wants to make it right for herself by his being seen speaking to her in public. I can answer for it that she will take good care to do no more."

While they were speaking a lady with two servants, a man and maid, drove up to the hotel from the station, ordered a pair-horse fly, and seeing the door of number one sitting-room ajar, walked in. She was closely veiled, and her face was turned away from them. They were not aware of her presence till the waiter came to say that her fly was at the door. Sherborne, who was standing close to the window, then looked around and saw her leave the room.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, "that was the very lady we were speaking of. She must have come sooner than was expected, and driven here to get a pair of horses to go on to Netherwood. Well! I can't help it."

"I am very glad she heard us, poor thing," said Dr. Ranston, "very glad indeed."

"I should be more glad," thought Sherborne, "if she hadn't heard quite all that I said."

The fly was now driving off. "I wonder who it is," remarked the waiter.

"Why, Miss Dytechley as was," answered the ostler.

"Well, to be sure!" said the Boots.

At twenty minutes past five, by the stable clock, Lady Dytechley arrived at Netherwood, and as soon as the big wicker imperial could be carried upstairs, began to decorate herself for the dinner-party at Bramscote. A report of Ida's unexpected arrival reached her as she was mounting the stairs; but she kept her feelings in reserve, her thoughts on the symbolical toilette already composed for the occasion. The toilette was, as usual, well adapted for its purpose. The body and skirt, with the appendages thereunto belonging, were of a limper material than she was wont to wear: the lines were in gentle curves that pointed more or less downwards: the train appeared to have no consciousness of its own dignity.

She had not yet seen Sir Richard. That unfortunate martyr to his own shortcomings knew that she was at home again, but he was very much engaged, at the time, in making feeble protests against a certain project that Ida had conceived in the Lyneham fly and now insisted on carrying into effect.

The first symptom of a disturbing nature was her prolonged retirement with her maid. Sir Richard marvelled after a while, remarking to himself that he had hardly seen her, and that she never used to be all that time fiddling about with silks and furbelows. He went to her door and continuously proclaimed his disappointment in a reproachful voice, till at last Ida appeared, wearing a blue and white dressing-gown over which a yard of golden hair hung down in loose waves.

"I shall be ready soon," she said; "but the things had to be unpacked, you know, and one's hair, after travelling"——

"Yes, but wait a moment," said he. "What are you dressing up like this for?"

"To dine at Bramscote. I shall be ready very soon."

She shut the door, and Sir Richard, not liking to remonstrate aloud from the other side, retreated to the nearest untenanted room, where he waited more than half-an-hour listening for her footsteps. At last she came, and then he executed a skilful manoeuvre. He suddenly rushed out of his hiding-place, and closing in from behind, caused her to step backwards into the room.

"My dear Ida," he said. "You know, you understand—you *must* see—it wouldn't do. It would look so—I should never hear the last of it."

"It can't be helped," said Ida, looking down at her fan without seeing it.

"God bless us all!" said he. "That isn't like you; and the voice is somebody else's—I don't know whose, for I don't know it. Don't you see, it wouldn't be right, and we should all look so rotten. It isn't a pretty word, but what can one say when one is driven into a corner? You see, you don't know exactly why your mother is going there. In fact, between you and I, she made Sir Roger do it, to get the meeting over. I wouldn't have mentioned the subject before you, only I *must* show you how it is. You didn't know that *he* is to be there, and I didn't want to tell you right out, of course—you understand me—but"—

"It can't be helped," repeated Ida, "and my mother has come. They were carrying the boxes upstairs ever so long ago."

"Well, but do listen to reason before we see her, or there will be such a row as never was."

He continued to remonstrate, looking from time to time at his watch, till Ida began to move, and then he followed her downstairs, muttering as he went:—

"What's to be done?" *I* won't go. I couldn't. I really couldn't be seen. Why, it's awkward enough as it is, very awkward for your mother (only she *would* have it) and worse for me who had nothing to do with anything. Elfrida felt it so that she went right off to Hazeley with a headache or something, and won't go, though they are all going. It would look like a got-up thing, and people would misunderstand—you know—they would indeed."

Whilst he was making this last appeal Lady Dytechley came on the scene. She was startled for a moment and unpleasantly reminded, by resemblance and by contrast, of that other dinner-party at Bramscote, with all its consequences; but the carriage had been waiting ten minutes at the door, and Ida meant to go.

"You see, Elfrida refused," said Lady Dytechley, "and they only expected two—and it would put everything out to take you instead of your father. If I had only known before"—

Ida looked unintelligently across the hall, and moved onwards towards the carriage.

"Stop a moment," said Sir Richard. "You see—what am I to do?"

"I can't help it," answered Ida in a pettish tone.

"This is what you have done with her," remarked Sir Richard. "She never used to go on like that. She was as good as gold. There it is. That's what you have done, with all your smelling-bottles, and your doctors that nobody ever heard say all the things, and your notes to Lady Oxborough, and the sparks flying upwards. You must get out of it as you can. I can do nothing with her."

Lady Dytechley crossed the hall in undignified haste.

"My dear Ida," she said, clutching at the nearest bit of drapery, "do wait an instant. I really don't see how"—

"I can't help it," repeated Ida. "They won't mind three."

"They won't have three," said Sir Richard, standing square in the middle of the hall. "I declare I won't go, if you do."

"Well, considering that Elfrida was to have gone," suggested Lady Dytechley.

"No, she wasn't," said he. "She wouldn't go at any price, just because the whole thing is so uncommonly awkward."

"Yes, but still, under the circumstances, as Ida is dressed, and Sir Roger is such an old friend of yours. Two ladies would never do, but one extra"—

"The one extra won't be me. I'll be"—

And these were again his two last words. Lady Dytechley objected interiorly, but had no means of expressing her thoughts, for Sir Richard, being the more active of the two, made use of his legs to symbolise his intention, and was out of sight before she could take any steps to cut off his retreat. Ida had by this time taken her place in the carriage, and Lady Dytechley followed, seeing no alternative within her reach but feeling a great heat in the roots of her hair.

The family coach moved off, and Sir Richard moved on, wondering whether there would be any dinner for him. As soon as the coast was clear he came forth, rang several bells and expressed himself thus :—

“Look here! I couldn’t go—I don’t know what’s the matter with me, I am sure”——

The butler, understanding the case and comparing it with a certain conspicuous absence at luncheon nine months before, asked whether the dinner should be at the usual time. Sir Richard paused and reflected.

“I have got to wait,” he thought, “anyhow, with nobody to speak to and nothing to do. I had better have something inside me first. But what am I to do all the evening? Upon my word, I could even stand that red-whiskered fellow.”

There was very little talking in the family coach; but Lady Dytchley gave full occupation to her inventive powers by imagining, rejecting and rehabilitating plausible excuses for her disarrangement of Sir Roger’s dinner table—that being her euphemistic manner of expressing the difficulty. The substitution of a lady for Sir Richard, though rather embarrassing when viewed in connection with the final cause of the dinner party, would not have deranged her dignity if the substitute had been any one except Ida; but as it was—oh!

“To have to walk into the room with *her*,” she thought, “and *he* there, and Lady Oxborough seeing it all, and one’s being left without one’s husband, as if one had done something one was ashamed of! If it had been any one else—even that nian with red whiskers, who always says something dreadful, or even Lady Fyfield, or that horrid old woman, Mrs. Atherstone. But to go in with Ida, so soon—the very first time after it all—and just when everything was to be made right, and to have it all set to wrongs, and make her and me to be misunderstood and talked about, and all because she *would*—Oh! oh! oh! oh!”

These interjections were uttered audibly in a corner of the family coach. Ida heard them, had a dim impression of their meaning, and muttered:—

“It can’t be helped.”

This remark brought the interjections to a sudden end, and produced a series of irrelevant statements, to which Ida replied in monosyllables. Before they had passed the lodge Lady Dytchley longed for the mild interruption of Sir Richard’s little songs, and registered a vow that she would never more explode at the sound of them.

"We shall be late," she thought, as the carriage drove up to the door, "and I shall have to explain before them all, with those two old maids from the Dower House listening and staring, and Mr. de Beaufoy looking at me—he is sure to be staying at Hazeley just now, when I particularly don't want to see him."

She approached in a deprecatory spirit, feeling herself to be—

"The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!"

Yet in fact she never was less observed, all observation being centred on Ida and Everard. Sir Roger Arden was exceedingly troubled at seeing Ida, and told himself in confidence that he had been played the fool with; but he was too well bred to show any sign of surprise. Lady Dytechley, feeling that she must be herself now, or something less ever after, said that Sir Richard had felt unwell (which was quite true when he contemplated the idea of coming there with them) and that he had insisted on sending Ida instead, which was no less true when considered as a question of alternatives. She then said a few words to Everard and passed on.

"The impudence of that woman exceeds all calculation," remarked Lady Oxborough, in a low but penetrating tone to Sir Roger, who protested and muttered, and said all sorts of irrelevant things to drown the clear vibrations of her voice. "She *is* so vulgar when she wants to show off. Who was she? I heard once, and I was just as wise as before."

But Sir Roger's hearing had become obtuse for the moment, and he slipped away, leaving the question to take care of itself, which it did by reaching the ears of Lady Dytechley, reminding her of the day when Sir Richard freed his soul at her expense in the Rue de Rivoli. It would be hard to say whether annoyance, irritation, or sense of failure predominated within; but necessity, though it knows no law, is often a law in itself. She was presently seen talking to Lady Oxborough, and Lady Oxborough, having paid her off for the unsuccessful proposal at Baveno, was moderately civil. All this happened in about three minutes, and in less than five, dinner was announced. Everard now came forward to meet Ida, who was moving on by slow degrees, talking to one person or another as she went. When Sir Roger was about to take her arm, she put her hand into

Everard's, let it linger there for an instant, and drawing it back haughtily, turned away. Everard appeared to be quite calm and almost impassive, as a mass of falling water looks motionless at a distance. He quietly mingled with the small group around, asked Miss Exmore how her new horse had turned out, and seeming to feel an interest in the answer, made his way onwards. Mrs. Sherborne said to herself, as he took her into dinner, "Either the spell is broken, or this will kill him."

She had arranged the party for her father, and restricted it, not only in number, but, as far as she could, in quality. Besides Lady Oxborough, for whose instruction it had been proposed, her husband and daughter, who were a necessary consequence, and the priest, who was always invited, no one came except from Hazeley; so that there were no reporters. This was not what Lady Dytechley had wanted; but, after overhearing Lady Oxborough's comment, she was of opinion that the party was quite large enough and, on the whole, well arranged. The table-talk was dull, constrained and broken. Everard, indeed, threw some life into the conversation near him, but only made the flatness more apparent by contrast. Mrs. Sherborne tried to second his efforts, and failed at the outset. "This wicked waste," she thought, "this trampling under foot a priceless treasure that was her own! What I see to-night stupifies me. I feel as if I were in a bad dream."

The number fourteen, though even and therefore reducible to seven pairs, has the awkward peculiarity of separating one pair and putting two ladies together. De Beaufoy was thus placed opposite Miss Exmore, whom he had taken in to dinner, but was not dissatisfied with that, having Mrs. Sherborne on his right; and Miss Exmore, being near Everard, whose adventures had aroused in her a large amount of curiosity, not devoid of hero-worship, had no objection to her position. She had Lady Fyfield on her right, but talked exclusively to him, and it was remarked that she had never appeared to such advantage. The follies of the period were put off, and left no trace. Her higher instincts were awakened. Hero-worship was doing a good work, at least as long as the occasion lasted. Everard could only talk to one at a time, and as Miss Exmore monopolised him, Mrs. Sherborne would have been left silent, had not

De Beaufoy been on the other side. Lady Dytchley, being on De Beaufoy's left, with Lord Oxborough on hers, wished herself at Netherwood, while Lord Oxborough, thinking his position inopportune, preferred to puzzle himself with Mrs. Atherstone, which enabled Sir Roger to converse with the priest instead of with Ida, whom he wished anywhere but next himself, and made Hubert talk to her against his will, which made Sherborne talk to Lady Oxborough against his, and left Lady Fyfield sitting silent, for Lady Dytchley, who was doing likewise, to contemplate at her leisure, but not at her ease. They were placed thus :—

Sir Roger Arden—Ida.

The Priest	}	}	Hubert Freville.
Mrs. Atherstone			Lady Oxborough
Lord Oxborough			Sherborne
Lady Dytchley			Lady Fyfield
De Beaufoy			Miss Exmore

Mrs. Sherborne—Lord de Freville.

The position of Lady Dytchley, between De Beaufoy, who had known her too long to be a pleasant neighbour just then, and Lord Oxborough, whose presence troubled her mind, whether he was talking to her or not, became at length so intolerable that she determined, at all hazards, to change it, and began to cast about in her mind for a plausible excuse. None presented itself, though she had never, perhaps, thought so vigorously before ; but it happened that Ida, in her wayward mood, had conceived the idea of taking her mother's place, and intended to do it, whatever might be said of her by any one there or elsewhere.

Dr. Ranston would not have been glad that she had overheard what he said at the White Hart, could he have foreseen the effect of his words. Had she not heard them, she would not have come to meet Everard, for no one would have told her that he would be there : but they had been heard, and she had come, impelled by an impulse that she could neither understand nor resist. She had seen him, and the sight was so conclusive to her heart that resentment was her only refuge from despair too overpowering to be concealed. She hated herself, but he had been the objective part of herself. The loss of him was the loss of all. If he had only not written those few dreadful words that she had

read—not thought them, not been capable of thinking them—she would have been the happiest woman in the world.

Poor child ! Her anger turned itself insensibly from the subjective part of her, that was nothing now because it was not his, to the objective that was all. She was angry with him because she was angry with herself.

Lady Dytchley felt her eyes without seeing them, and looking up, saw her lean forward, shivering impatiently, as if suffering from cold either in fact or in idea. She at once improved the occasion with all her might.

"I am afraid you are feeling the draught," she said, "coming from Italy," she meant Ida—not the draught—"and I should like the air so much, after being stuffed up in a railway carriage with an old lady who had bronchitis and wouldn't let in a breath of air."

"I am so sorry I had that window put open," said Sir Roger : "but the weather changed so suddenly. It shall be shut at once."

"I assure you that it will be the greatest comfort to me," said she, "and just what I have been wanting all day—if you will allow me to change places with her. It really will."

Sir Roger, who had been secretly wishing that Ida, or himself, but not both together, were happening to sit somewhere else, replied with moderated alacrity :—

"By all means ! I only hope it hasn't done any mischief."

Lady Dytchley edged herself and her chair out of the space they had filled, walked as unobtrusively as she could to the top of the table, and sitting down within the smallest possible compass, tried to seem as if she had not moved.

Ida was already in her place, causing Lord Oxborough to wish himself away even more anxiously than before.

De Beaufoy wished that both she and himself were at some part of the table where Everard was not ; for her state of mind could be read in the chilled light of her eyes and in the volcanic stillness of her face, from which every trace of colour had gone.

She turned her head slowly towards him for an instant, without looking, and said :—

"Have you forgotten me ? I hardly know how long it is

since I saw you last, for I don't remember much about what I was, and care still less ; but it seems to me that the time is not very long, according to the almanac."

"Time is more likely to show its marks in me than in you," answered De Beaufoy, "seeing that I am three and twenty years older. I certainly had not forgotten you, and could not, unless I had lost sight and memory."

"Sight and memory? I used once to think they were realities—and feeling, too, and the sound of spoken words, and the meaning of their tones—but they are all fancy, and the thing that fancies them, which one calls 'I,' has no separate existence, as soon as one ceases to dream. The object one believes in melts away, or turns out to be somebody else when one approaches it."

The words, though spoken to De Beaufoy, were directed to Everard, especially the last. Yet no sooner were they uttered than a softer expression came into her eyes, momentary repentance into her heart.

De Beaufoy remained silent long enough to show that he was waiting till she had quite finished, and then said in a very deferential voice :—

"Forgive me for saying so—but one must be open when it comes to principles—those ideas are not yours, and they sit uneasily upon you. I am not at all up in the sort of thing ; but Kant, if I am not mistaken, reduced everything that we perceive in ourselves and out of ourselves to mere phenomena ; and Fichte improved on him, till he made life a dream ; and Hegel went further still, for, as somebody said of him, he omitted the dreamer. Did you ever see those lines in Hans Breitmann's ballads :—

*'As der Hegel say of his system, dat only one mans knew
What der Teufel it meant, und he couldn't tell, und der
Jean Richter too,
Who say of his Buch, God knows I meant somedings
When dis Buch I writ,
But God only weiss what dass Buch means now, for
I have forgotten it.'*"

"I don't care where it came from," said Ida ; "I never said it was my own. I daresay it is Hegel's, and I don't care if it is."

"And I didn't say that it was. How could I, without the man who knew what der Teufel it meant? I am not

pretending to say or guess where it came from; but the outcome of it is more startling than you are aware of, perhaps. You allow, I suppose, that there is such a thing as a soul."

"Yes, of course. One knows there is something, whatever it may be, besides one's body."

"And you allow that its existence is part of yours—that you wouldn't be alive without it?"

"Yes, yes. I said so."

"Well, then, if you have no separate existence, and your soul is part of you, your soul is a joint-stock property that you possess in common with the rest of the world."

"Yes, that is the kind of thing I mean."

"Are you prepared to say that you and Exmore have one soul?"

The sound of that name, indissolubly bound up with the last hours of her once perfect confidence in Everard, brought colour into her pale cheeks, light into the depths of her eyes. Everard looked, and tried to wish that he had not seen her. He looked again, and every nerve shivered like poplar leaves on a hillside. Then the colour left her cheeks, and the light in her eyes lost its warmth.

"I think you might have avoided mentioning that contemptible puppet, at least," she said; and the tone of her voice would have much diminished the said Mr. Exmore interiorly, though her contempt was thoroughly undeserved, except from her own very natural point of view.

"I mentioned him simply as the extremest case I could think of," said De Beaufoy. "If we have no separate existence, we must all have one soul, and Exmore's cannot be separated from yours. The conclusion is inevitable. I don't wonder at your not liking the idea—I shouldn't like to find that my own soul was inseparable from Garibaldi's—but, if your principle is to be admitted, we must both of us submit to that sort of communism. In both cases the idea seems to me one of the most unpleasant that could be evolved out of anybody's inner consciousness: but then I don't believe in a universal soul. You tell me implicitly that you do, and, if it really is as you say, you cannot get rid of Exmore."

"You must know very well," said Ida pettishly, "that I couldn't have meant to talk such nonsense as that. But I

am not able to argue with you, and so you could twist my words as you liked."

"On the contrary, I untwisted them. You will see on reflection that what I have said is as plain as a Methodist chapel newly whitewashed."

"Yes, if I had meant all you supposed: but you *must* have known that I didn't."

"I did; but other people would have misunderstood you, and I took the liberty of showing how."

"But you are running away with the idea that I meant nothing in what I said. I *do* believe that we are all a part of something else—I don't know what—and are changed, I don't know how, quite changed, so that there is nothing left of our former self. You may tell me for ever that it isn't so, and give reasons that I can't answer; but you won't convince me, against the evidence of open facts, and the testimony of my own eyes and of my own consciousness with regard to myself."

"How can you be conscious of being somebody that you are not?"

"I don't mean that one becomes another person, as if you were changed into me. I mean that one's character, disposition, temper, likes and dislikes—all that makes one what one is, and what one has been known by and liked for—changes so that one can only remember in a confused sort of way what one was, and, if one ever tries to think how one could be the same again, one finds that it can't be, because all that made one so has changed, and one's nature has changed with it."

"Poor dear child!" thought De Beaufoy. "She has been talking at me, not to me. They were meant to be one, and she is angry with him because she is angry with herself. What can I do to turn the conversation?"

"We are all more or less affected by circumstances," he said; "but unhappily we are inclined to forget, when we have the greatest need of remembering it, how much they are in our own power. Mrs. Atherstone, who is the most interesting old lady I ever knew, with great originality and a strong touch of genius, could tell you that, and illustrate it from the history of her own remarkable life, which has been at different times a tragedy, a novel and a drama. Did you ever talk to her?"

"No," said Ida in a softer voice. "I ought to have known her well, but I don't. I have often wished that I did."

"You really ought. She is worth knowing, I can assure you. If you like, I can give you a little epitome of her life and character in a few words, for I know both very well."

He did so, but not in a few words, and then he passed on to other subjects, without pause or break, hoping to keep her attention till the ladies left the room; but by degrees her mind wandered from his words, her eyes towards Everard.

"Could you or anyone have imagined," said Lady Oxborough to Sherborne, "that any mother would be so devoid of delicacy as to make such an exhibition, and not only bring her here, but actually change places, to put her as near him as possible?"

"I think she has simply lost her head over it," answered Sherborne. "When people believe in themselves too much, if they happen to lose their self-confidence, they are liable to collapse like an Indiarubber ball with a hole in it."

"Yes, but to put her there, and make such a scene! If I had had the least idea of this, nothing should have made me come. I came here out of kindness to that horrid woman, when I ought to have been in town four days ago; and this is what I am let in for. But I never will meet her again anywhere."

"She will hear what you say," whispered Sherborne.

"I hope she does," answered Lady Oxborough. "The thing is disgraceful, and it would serve her right if Lord de Freville never spoke to her again. And so very, very wrong, too, towards her own daughter. I pity *her*, poor thing, making herself so dreadfully conspicuous, and looking at him—as if it were *his* fault!—like Norma when she denounces Pollione and is sorry for it."

If Lady Oxborough had remembered the twentieth canto of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, she could have found an apter comparison in Armida shooting at Rinaldo, and wishing that her arrows should miss their mark or turn against herself.

*"Vorria ben ella ch'el quadrel pungente
Tornasse indietro, e le tornasse al core :
Tanto poteva in lei, benchè perdente,
(Or che potria vittorioso ?) Amore.
Ma di tal suo pensier poi si ripente ;
E nel discorde sen cresce il furor.
Così or paventa, ed or desia che tocchi
Appieno il colpo, e l segue pur con gli occhi."*

De Beaufoy, failing this time to change the character of the conversation, adroitly introduced one topic after another, so that at length, but not till the ice was on its way, he almost monopolised the talking. He lost his advantage once, and she was having her own way again more decisively than before, when Mrs. Sherborne ended the struggle by rising to leave the room.

When the ladies had gone, Sir Roger walked slowly to the bottom of the table, saying to himself, "If ever I let anybody catch me again in this way! No wonder Dytchley had a stomach-ache ready." Then he sat down by Everard, casting a rueful glance at De Beaufoy, that said as plainly as a face could speak, "Do help me, like a good fellow, to start something pleasant."

"So you have got some archæologists coming here to-morrow," said De Beaufoy.

"Yes, by the by. I am glad you have reminded me," answered Sir Roger, trying to look amused. "You really must come and help me. There will be about half a dozen of them."

"What are they going to look at, besides the Roman encampment where there is nothing to see but grass mounds?"

"They don't care to see that. They want to see what remains here of the old house, that my great grandfather sold some of the best land to pull down. They say there is something wonderful in the kitchen, and in the cellars, I believe. One of them is a Ledchester man. I have asked them to luncheon. I hope you will all come. Upon my word it will be a charity, for I don't know how to talk about these things."

The invitation was addressed audibly to all present. De Beaufoy and Sherborne promised to come. The priest had done so already. Lord Oxborough was very sorry, but would be half-way to London at that time. Everard said nothing about himself, but answered for Hubert, who was on the point of making an excuse. Hubert returned the

compliment by ordering the carriage a few minutes afterwards. Everard, having done what he had come to do, and ventured more than he felt at all justified in venturing again, had already registered a resolution that he would not enter the drawing room. He said to Sir Roger, "Please, make my excuses to Mrs. Sherborne," and then he talked about the remains of the old house till the carriage was announced. When he had gone there was a dead silence, and then a murmuring sound of voices repressed.

In the drawing room Mrs. Atherstone had been talking exclusively to Ida, and, about this time, having won as much of her confidence as there was to give, looked steadily into her eyes, saying :—

"You must pardon what I am going to say—I am so very old, and have seen and suffered so very much—but you are not yourself. You are in an unnatural state. I have been so myself, long long ago, and I know how dreadful it is to bear, and how mad one feels, and how one longs for appreciative sympathy, even when one is most disposed to reject it. Won't you open your heart to an old woman who in her time has felt and suffered, perhaps, as much as human nature can bear? I can sympathise with you—understand you more fully and more intelligently than anyone who has not suffered as much as I have, and in the same way, can possibly do. Won't you open your heart to me?"

"I would," said Ida, after a short struggle with the pride of misery. "You are the only person that I could bear to hear speak on the subject. But you know it all: you *must* know it. Every one here knows it. No! they don't, they only know the outside. They don't know what I went through before I became what I am now. They don't know how I was kept in maddening suspense, incessantly hearing dark hints that grew darker as time went on, clinging to my faith in that beautiful dream, hoping because I hoped in him, loving because I loved him, believing because I believed that all he said was true. I had no other foundation of belief, for I had been taught nothing that was intelligible of religion, except that the Catholic Church was out of the question. I had found it in him, as he was or seemed. When I saw in his own handwriting that he was false to me"——

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you," said Mrs.

Atherstone, "but have you the letter? I have a reason for asking the question."

"Yes, I have it at Netherwood in my writing-case."

"Then, will you allow me to see it? Life is uncertain, and his particularly so, if I am not mistaken. The past cannot be recalled nor the consequences undone, but you would regret to have misjudged him; and regret, in such a case, means remorse. Don't bring that upon yourself. I have experienced it, and know too well what it is."

"You shall see the letter to-morrow, if you will come to Netherwood. I wouldn't show it to anyone else in the world: but you tell me that you have felt as I feel and suffered as I suffer; and you have shown kindness to me, which no one else has done, not even my own sister. She went away when I came."

"Only to avoid dining here. Her motive was good, and I think she acted wisely. She is going home to-morrow, and early, on purpose to see you as soon as possible. When shall I call?"

"Before luncheon, if it will not be inconvenient to you, for there will be nobody at home then. I hope you will come. It was very kind of you to propose it. But the letter is—what it is. When you have seen that letter, you will be and remain the only person in the world who knows what I endured before I became what I am. My mother has read it, for she told me of it and showed it to me; but she never understood me, and nobody does, except you."

"Then," said Mrs. Atherstone, "I will call as soon after eleven as I can. But they are coming in from the dining room, and we might be overheard. "Well, then—if I am alive and movable, I shall be at Netherwood by half-past eleven to-morrow morning."

Sherborne came up to Ida and talked for some time. She listened with her ears and answered as if attending, but her eyes were fixed on the door through which Everard did not come, till at last she rose from her chair, saying:—

"I am very sorry to go away so soon; but I crossed from Boulogne late last night, and had no sleep at all. I must ask my mother to order the carriage, for I can hardly sit up."

In moving on towards Lady Dytechley she passed Sir Roger, who was talking to Mrs. Sherborne, and heard him say:—

"He told me to make his excuses to you. He went away with Hubert Freville before we left the dining room. I wish he hadn't come. The doctor (so his brother told me) says that anything of this kind might kill him. He said that, if he had known who they were to meet, he would have sent out every horse in the stables to prevent it."

Lady Dytechley, whose inner self was in a state of excessive disquietude, met Ida's intention half way, and came towards her in undignified haste walking limply.

"I really must go," she said. "I am tired to death."

Ida answered, "Very well," and asked Sherborne to order the carriage. Soon afterwards he and Sir Roger handed them into it. There had been very little conversation inside the family coach during the drive to Bramscote, and there was less when they drove home.

CHAPTER XLI.



"It was all my fault, fool that I was!" muttered Hubert, for his own private information, when he rose in the morning. "I ought to have prevented it, at any cost. He was not the worse for it then, thank God! But the worst consequences are sometimes the slowest."

He dressed in hot haste, and hurried out of his room to see how Everard was. Anne the housemaid came by, and turning as she passed him, stood in the way.

"Oh, sir!" she said. "'That dreadful bell! Did you hear it?"

"No. What bell! What is the matter?"

"The Freville bell, sir, that rings, you know, before—I heard it myself the night before my lord's father died. I heard it soon after daybreak this morning—indeed I did—at first far away over the Chase, and then coming nearer and nearer, till it sounded right over the tower. Whatever shall we all do?"

Hubert hurried on, and opening the door of the king's room, went in. Everard, who was dressed but lying on the bed, more than half asleep, woke at the sudden sound and vibration of footsteps.

"Am I late?" he said, jumping up. "I dressed long ago, but when I looked at my watch I found it was only five o'clock. Is it late?"

"No, not at all. I only came to see that you were all right after—the long drive. But what made you mistake the time?"

"I thought I heard the bell ringing for Mass, and got up in a hurry."

"But how are you?"

"Thank you," said Everard smiling wearily, "I am just as well as I was before. There is safety sometimes in having to struggle with oneself. It must have happened soon. But what is the matter with *you*? They must have been telling you something. Has the Freville bell been ringing in somebody's imagination? I see by your face it has. A bell rang early this morning, I know—I heard it myself—but it was the church bell tolling at Exbourne. The wind sets right for it, and the distance is not more than a mile and a half in a straight line, for the road is very roundabout from here. I know the sound, and I could hear where it came from. Besides," he added, smiling as of yore, "you musn't go in for 'omens, dreams, and such like fooleries,' as the catechism says."

Hubert went away, convinced, but not satisfied, repeating to himself Dr. Ranston's caution, spoken the day before, on leaving Freville Chase: "Wonderfully better—but there must be no relaxation of care."

Four hours afterwards, that is to say, at or about half-past eleven, Mrs. Atherstone appeared at Netherwood, and asking for Ida, was taken upstairs to her bedroom.

"I must apologise for bringing you here," said Ida: but I was afraid of being interrupted."

"You have treated me as a friend," answered Mrs. Atherstone, and I hope to show that I am."

"I have no doubt of that," said Ida: "but not in the way you suppose. When you have heard all, you will see that it cannot be. You will see that I have not deceived myself. Deceive myself? I only wish that it were so, that it were

possible to think so, that it were possible to deceive myself into thinking I had deceived myself! It could alleviate nothing, and would add remorse to misery; yet I had rather believe it, though untrue, than be as I am. I would believe in him, if it were possible. I could cling without hope to that belief. But it cannot be."

She opened her writing-desk, and took out the two half sheets of Everard's letter to the Marquis Moncalvo.

"This is it," she said. "But you must hear me first. I am not going to repeat what I said yesterday evening about myself and all that I endured, and all I struggled against, from the day I left England to the day when life became existence. I am only going to tell you what will prepare you for the letter. When my mother insisted on leaving home a day sooner than was expected, I sent a note to him to come and see me that evening, and I know that the note was given to him, for Elfrida gave it to a man in the village and saw it go. He never came. I know why. My mother told him (though I never knew it till long afterwards) that she should consider us disengaged while she and I remained abroad. He said nothing to that. She accidentally picked up this letter in the sitting-room of the hotel at Florence, and gave me an outline of its contents. I wrote, imploring him to come and refute what I firmly believed to be an abominable calumny—you will see what it was. I had no answer. I waited three weeks, expecting him daily to arrive. Then my mother gave it into my own hands—this letter that I am going to show you—and I wrote again, in a state of mind that I think you can imagine. Again he neither came nor wrote."

"Are you sure that he got all the letters you wrote to him?" said Mrs. Atherstone.

"I know he got the first I wrote from Florence. I gave the letter myself to the courier, who is a careful and trustworthy person, and told him to post it directly, which he did. It was the 12th of October. Besides, Elfrida told me that he *had* received it—she told me so in one she wrote to me the very day he got it. In mine, as I said, I had begged and implored him to come, and told him that my mother wished him to come. His not doing so explains why he said nothing when my mother told him that she should consider us disengaged while I was abroad—a thing

that I neither would nor could have believed at the time, if all the world had sworn to it. Elfrida said he was out of spirits, and I know why ; but I cannot trust myself to speak of it. 'The letter I have in my hand will show sufficient cause for that, and explains why he did not care to come or write. Here it is.'

Mrs. Atherstone took it, and this was what she read :—

First half sheet.

Page 1.

My dear Marquis,

"I have been with Sir Richard all the morning, and shall be out all the afternoon ; so that I should have put off answering your letter till to-morrow, had it been a less important one.

The serio-comic affair in the lane was really nothing, as far as I am concerned. The two roughs never hit me at all, and the leader began to squeak as soon as he was touched. The poor thing was frightened, of course, but is not the worse for it.

Page 2.

I am sorry to disoblige you, but I cannot use my influence to persuade her to return to Italy, nor can I send her away. Looking at her past history, I can only see that she has a right to my protection as long as she claims it. That protection she shall have.

You are correct about the light you saw one evening in the tower. She was concealed there then, but now lives openly in my house with the servants, and cannot possibly be a cause of suspicion (as you suggest she might) to Miss Dytchley. But I really do not care

Second half Sheet.

and cannot see the beauty you speak of, but as she seems likely to be a good wife, and her fortune will help to keep up the old place, one must say according to the adage, ' Handsome is as handsome does.'

*In great haste.—Believe me, yours very sincerely,
Everard Freville.*

Mrs. Atherstone read it through slowly, and then turned the two half sheets over, as if reading it again.

"It can't be so," she said to herself. "I am as certain of that as my own existence. But what can be the meaning of it? Stop! How stupid I am. There is something very suspicious in these half sheets. There must be something left out."

She went to the window, examined both carefully, and then compared them, not cursorily, but by accurate measurement.

"Just look here," she said, holding them up to the light.

"These are not halves of one sheet, but of two. You can see it by the watermark, which is the same in each—proving that they both are the left-hand leaves of two separate sheets. I say 'left,' because one begins on the left leaf; but anyhow they are two lefts or two rights, by the watermark, and he wouldn't have written on half sheets of paper without making some excuse or saying something about it. And look at the edges, where it was divided. If you examine the little jagged edges closely while I place them together, you will see that they don't agree. The inequalities are very slight, but there they are; and (see now) they won't fit in."

Ida took the two half sheets and examined them attentively. "You are right," she said. "They don't fit. The right half of the first sheet must have been torn off."

"And the other half of the second, as well," added Mrs. Atherstone.

"Or half a sheet came to hand in the blotting book, and was used as being lighter for the foreign post."

"I don't think so," answered Mrs. Atherstone; "for though the edges of the two don't fit, one hand (it seems to me) must have divided both. There is the same amount of force and the same sharpness in the jags. I should say that both sheets were torn in two by the same person at the same moment. However, I don't care whether it was so or not. The important point is that the first and second leaves have no connection with each other, which you have seen to be the case. But why and by whom was the first sheet torn in two—or if you will, cut? Well, it doesn't signify who did it, nor why it was done. Clearly it was done with an object which the writer could not have had. I need hardly insist upon that. Then somebody else did it, and in

doing it, must have intended to put the writer in the worst light, and would not have suppressed the other page unless it would have put the writer in a more favourable light. You *must* see that."

"There is only one person who could have done it," said Ida passionately. "It could only be he who had an object in doing it and the means of doing it—he who let it fall on the floor for my mother to pick up and make the most of."

"I must beg you most earnestly," said Mrs. Atherstone, "not to let that influence you against him. There are duties that nothing can exempt us from."

Ida crushed the two half sheets between her fingers and smoothed them again with repressed violence, but said nothing.

"And there are temptations," added Mrs. Atherstone, "that we don't understand, because we don't know how they came, nor how unprepared for them the tempted person was. *You* are open to be misjudged in that way, and you *are* misjudged, and you know that you are misjudged; and therefore you must think of others by the light of that knowledge."

"There certainly is a half sheet wanting," said Ida, "and I don't know what was written on it: but whatever it was, it cannot undo what *is* written, cannot make him not to have written what he wrote."

"Certainly not; and if it means what the words, as they stand, appear to mean, I have nothing more to say. But I have read the letter very carefully and critically, and I am convinced that they don't. In the last sentence, as it stands, the style, which is slovenly, and the punctuation, too, in that part, is not his—is not in accordance with the rest of the letter. I could show that easily, but I want to ask you a question that may or may not be worth asking. When you wrote the first of your two letters after you had read this, summoning him to Italy, did you happen to have sent an unimportant one, in the ordinary course of things, the same day, or just before?"

"I did write on the day before, and put it as usual on the table, for the courier to post. He used to come and look there for letters every day."

"And so did somebody else, I suspect," thought Mrs. Atherstone. "Confiscating a letter would be no worse than

manipulating its contents and putting it conveniently in the way, to be read in that condition. This is very awkward, considering that he is her husband. Somehow one can't do good without doing mischief. One can't get her into a right state of mind without getting her into a wrong one. But then I have to choose between two evils, and there is no doubt as to which is the least. If she goes on in this way, she will become an infidel; for she knows where the truth is, yet she can't (or thinks that she can't) believe what she knows, unless she recovers her belief in Lord de Freville, which she can't do without despising the man who cheated her into marrying him. But she despises him already as much as possible—nothing can be clearer than that—and so she can't despise him more, and so no harm can be done. So in fact there is only one evil, and that would be to hold my tongue."

"Are you quite sure," she said, "that all the letters went? and that none were written to you in Italy, except what you received? I am not accusing anyone."

"The courier has not gone yet. I can find out from him. I wrote no letters to England from Florence just then, except those two."

She rang the bell sharply. Her maid came running in, alarmed at the continuous loudness of the peal, and summoned the courier, who felt rather surprised but maintained the outward placidity that befitted his calling.

"Do you happen to remember posting a letter for me at Florence on the 11th of October? You could see by your book."

He left the room and presently returning book in hand, examined his accounts.

"There is no entry of any English letter on the 11th," he said. "On the 12th I put a stamp on a letter that you gave me, and I was going to post it, when the Marquis followed me down the stairs and gave me another instead, saying that it was a mistake and that you had sent him with the right one. He took mine away. They were both for My Lord de Freville."

"Do you happen to remember posting another for me, three weeks afterwards? You would have found it on the table."

"No, Madame la Marquise. I never saw that letter, and never heard of it till now."

"Did any one besides yourself ever go to the post-office for letters? I ask because two or three from England were not, I believe, received, and I wanted to know whether they may have been lost or mislaid in that way, or whether it was the fault of the post."

"Latterly I did not go for the letters. I sprained my ankle, and the Marquis was so kind as to say that he would call for them, which he did till we left Florence."

"Did you go for them while we were in Rome?"

"Every day; but there were none. A telegram was brought, four days (I think) before—before you, Madame, left Rome. The Marquis took it from me, to take to Lady Dytechley. I think he must have mislaid or forgotten it, because her ladyship asked me about it afterwards, when Mr. Freville called. Mr. Freville told her that Sir Richard had telegraphed from Lyneham, and she sent for me to know what had become of it. The Marquis was very much engaged when it arrived, and must have mislaid or forgotten it."

"Yes, it was very likely to happen," said Ida, with an emphasis of double meaning, one for the courier, the other for herself. Thank you for having remembered it all so long afterwards. I shall always have great pleasure in recommending you."

The courier bowed, and thanking her for her good wishes, left the room.

"You were right," she said in a low voice that partly smothered its own sound of agony. "I have been deceived—but that is no word for it. No word, no multitude of words can express what has been done. Don't ask me to forgive it, I never can—never will. Yet how can I wonder at anything, feel anything, care for anything, when I have these written words before my eyes? Don't tell me that the missing half sheet would alter their sense—do away with his own admission about the encounter in the lane . . . besides, to begin with, how is it that he never told me in any of his letters about such an important thing as that adventure clearly was? My mother reminded me over and over again, that he would have done so, must have done so if he had not been ashamed of it. No. The truth is too plain to be mistaken."

"Yet the two missing pages might change the meaning of

everything completely," said Mrs. Atherstone. "But I am not going to tell you any more, for you are not in a fit state of mind, and I should only do harm by staying any longer."

"So you are going to desert me, like the rest. Why did I imagine that any one could understand me now, when I scarcely understand myself?"

"You poor unhappy child!" said Mrs. Atherstone, pressing her hand with the vigour of early days, "I understand you as thoroughly as one human being can understand another. Can't I make you believe that I have been young like you, loving passionately like you, hopeless like you? I can feel for and with you, because I know what a woman can feel when the hope of her young life has been crushed; and I go, because it is better for you that I should. You will be better alone just now. Think of what we have made out of those two half sheets and the missing sheet, and what the courier told you. Think over it alone at your leisure, and come to Hazeley, or send for me, whenever you feel that I can be of use to you. I shall always be ready and anxious to help you at any time and in any way that experience and affection (if I may say so on so limited an acquaintance) may suggest. I must go now. The carriage will be moving about in front. I told the coachman to put up for half an hour only and then come round. Remember that I do understand you, and feel intensely for you."

"I will," said Ida. "I do. I can't express myself, but I feel your kindness much more than you think. Tell me one thing. What do they mean by talking as if he were ill? I heard Sir Roger Arden saying that his dining at Bramscote might kill him; and there was a man at Lyneham, I don't know who, talking in the same way, but not so clearly, to Mr. Sherborne. I heard it while I was waiting for a fly."

"I don't know what they said," answered Mrs. Atherstone, opening the door; but I know that he has been seriously ill. Don't forget to write or send, whenever I can be of use to you."

She shut the door, and Ida, walking back to the window, examined the half sheets again.



CHAPTER XLII.



AFTER repeated delays and much grumbling, Hubert mounted at twelve o'clock and rode off unwillingly, to be in time for the archæologists at Bramscote.

"Don't forget to stand by Sir Roger in his extremity," said Everard, who had come out to speed his departure: "and if they puzzle you with big words, fall back on a principle. The less they understand it the better it will serve the purpose."

"I wish they were—somewhere else," answered Hubert, looking back. "I don't wish them any harm; but I had rather be with you, talking to old Barnes."

"I particularly wanted not to leave him alone to-day," he added mentally; and that is the very head and front of their offending."

Everard went into the house, and talked for some time to old Barnes the steward, who had come from Beynham with that intent. When Barnes had gone some one else took up his time till luncheon was ready. By two o'clock all necessary employment was over, and then he began to feel what his meeting with Ida meant. The enormous effort had braced him up to the utmost limit of endurance, and he seemed able to bear anything while the tension lasted, as,

for a while, it naturally did by the force that made it. There was no necessity now for that effort, no necessary work for him to do, and he was alone. He walked out, came back again directly, and after standing for some moments in the hall, strangely irresolute, went to the stables. Then he ordered his horse and looked in. The first object he saw was the dark chestnut. He shivered and passed out.

"No, I won't ride," he said. "Did I say that I would? How very odd!"

The last words were said to himself, as he wandered back towards the house; but while he uttered them they lost all meaning in his mind. He had forgotten the stables and the dark chestnut and every external object, except Ida as she was now, as he had last seen her, as she had looked and spoken then. A mist was around him, but not as he had ever seen one, not as the eye sees what is naturally before it. The outer world was not obscured, but excluded. The whole space before him was void, except in one place. The image of Ida stood out as from a distant background of cold light. The image grew more vivid, the light colder, and the remembrance of her words became a sound—an echo whose tones were more intense than when they fell from her lips. The old coachman went by and said something about one of the horses. Everard looked up and answered absently:—

"Yes. I had forgotten. I shall ride presently—at three o'clock. No! what o'clock is it? In about an hour, I mean."

"That isn't like him," thought Sandford. "We're never easy about him now."

Then some one wanted to see him. He answered, "No, I can't—I really can't," and went into the gallery. There the impression grew more and more distinct, the story it unfolded more heartbreaking, more terrible, more prophetically hopeless. This after-impression of their last meeting showed that, even when he saw her in Rome dressed as another man's bride, he had not heard all. He had lost her then, and the fact was crushing the life out of him; but he knew that: and life now seemed a shadowy thing, marked only by its end. He had known since that her heart, in its bitterness, was closed against the Faith once hers, and once again; but there was a cause for that, a

cause that need not, would not last. He had yet to learn that she was rejecting all truth—consenting to reject it—and he had learnt this at Bramscote, read it in her face, heard it from her own lips. Was this to be the end of all that he had hoped in Ida and with her, the last thing that would be known to him in the story of their separated lives?

“I could bear anything, everything, except that,” he said aloud, looking out of the western bay by force of habit. “I can face what I have had to bear, for life is passing perceptibly and its hopes are a solemn anachronism now. But to think of her as she was and as she is, to know that *his* or *their* work, I know not which, goes beyond the lives they have sacrificed—beyond? The massacre of the innocents was mercy, compared with this.”

He staggered back from the window, and knelt before a crucifix that was on the writing-table.

“Oh! my God!” he exclaimed in his agony, “help me, or I shall go mad. If I have ever tried to do Thy will, ever struggled with myself to do it, grant this one prayer—let me suffer for her. She has suffered so much for me, and suffering has unsettled her will. Let me have her share, and more. I have heard that suffering accepted strengthens prayer. I pray for her with all the will I have. Let me suffer more, live on to suffer, live but to suffer for her and pray for her. I ask nothing for myself—nothing for her, except the grace of conversion. Thou knowest that she has been the victim of tyrannous and continued fraud. Oh! my God and Saviour, who didst, in Thine infinite love, die on the cross to redeem sinners, give her strength to overcome the difficulties into which that fraud has plunged her soul. Grant to her the gift of faith.”

He rose unsteadily from his knees, and sinking down exhausted on the nearest seat, remained in the same position so long, that any one seeing him there might have questioned whether he was alive or dead. At length he moved a little and looked about, as one who wakes up at a sudden sound. There was no colour in his face, but a strange calmness, as of hope given. He took up a book, read a little without attention, and shut it.

“There is that man who wanted to see me,” he thought, crossing the room and ringing the bell. The man had gone away an hour ago.

"So long!" he said. "I am sorry for it. Send and ask him to come again this evening, if he can. Didn't I tell Sandford that I would ride? I am not sure. Say that I shall be out directly."

It was one of those rare May days that anticipate summer and retain the freshness of spring. The sun was powerful rather than hot, the air balmy and bracing, the light brilliant without glare. Songs of many birds filled the old pleasure-ground with melodies made one by nature's art, and the warm monotone of an early bumble-bee hummed a rich pedal note as he flew slowly by the open window. Everard looked and turned away.

"Not for me now," he said. "Harmony of sound, form, colour, fragrance, vital forces. All is life and promise of life. All is growing and life-giving, and has its own proper work here, its own future. I have loved it so much, associated it so much and so constantly with all that I ought to tear from my heart—and cannot. . . Didn't I order the brown mare? I can remember nothing this afternoon. I think I must have asked the question before of some one. And then I was here an hour (so they said) and thought it was a few minutes."

He went into the hall, meaning to ride, and looked through one of its windows on his way, to see if the horse was at the door. The brown mare had not yet appeared, but a carriage was passing under the gatehouse. He went slowly back to the gallery, not wishing to see the visitors and not caring to avoid them.

The old butler came in, and stood in an obstructive attitude, looking reluctant and anxious.

"There's a lady at the door, my lord," he said, "who doesn't give her name. She left the carriage by the gatehouse, and I can't see her face for her veil—or two veils there must be."

"It must be that Italian woman," thought Everard, "come in a Lyneham fly to ask for more money, which I am not going to give her. Does she want to see me?" he said.

"Yes, my lord: but I wouldn't see her, if it was me. There's something"——

"No. It may be of some use to her, perhaps, or to somebody. I don't like refusing to see any one."

"Well, my lord, if it *must* be."

In a few minutes the lady was shown into the gallery. A double veil of dark gauze hid the whole of her face. A thin white cloak hung on her shoulders loosely.

"Ida!" he exclaimed in a tone that startled them both. "If you ever"——

"I *was* called so," she said, putting aside her veil, "and I pass for the same person still. I wonder you remember me. I don't think you did yesterday. But I see that my presence annoys you. Let me ask one or two questions—they will not take long—and you shall be rid of it for ever."

He put a chair by her. She hesitated for a moment, and sat down.

"Did you receive a letter that I wrote from Florence on the 12th of October, asking and imploring you to come there immediately?"

Everard struggled with himself desperately to keep up an appearance of calmness.

"No," he said. "I never received it at all—never heard of it."

"Never? I wrote in such dreadful distress about what they had said of you, and begged you to come, and said that my mother wished you to come."

"No. I never heard from you after the 12th of October, until the end of November."

"But Elfrida wrote me word that you had received it, and that you were out of spirits, and my mother said it was because you couldn't answer the thing."

"No. I received a letter written by you on the 11th of October—I am sure of the date, because I read it very often—but there was nothing in it about coming to Florence, nothing about an answer to any question whatever. I am at a loss to imagine, or even guess, what your mother meant."

"But you never wrote to me"——

"I wrote four times to Florence after that; and then your mother said, in a letter to Elfrida, that it would be useless to write any more, because you would be leaving Florence directly and moving from place to place, on the way home. I wrote, however, again on that day, in hopes of catching you somewhere."

"And you never heard from me? Why didn't you come to see? If you had cared, you would."

Because your mother told me at Netherwood, the last time I saw her, that I must not follow you abroad, and insisted on it afterwards in her letters. She said that, if I did so, she would put off the —— she said two years and promised at the same time that otherwise she would come back as soon as possible. She promised afterwards, more than once, that she would be at home by the end of November. I have her letters. She had made such a point of my not following you abroad that I went to the extreme limit of endurance, and made up my mind that I would wait till then, but not a day longer. Hubert was to have gone to Florence, or wherever you might be, and then, if necessary, I should have put forward your rights and mine in such a way that it could no longer have been set aside. He would have started for Florence on the 30th of November, but early that morning”——

“Not to follow us abroad? And she said she would return by the end of November? Did she write it? Are you sure?”

“By the end of November, at the very latest; and then it should be immediately. She wrote it twice—three times. The letters are here. You have a right to know the whole truth, and I have a right to tell it.”

He opened a despatch-box that was on the writing-table, and taking out a small bundle of letters tied together, put them into her hand. When she had glanced at them, he said:—

“Hubert would have gone some time before, but he was detained at Beynham, and as your mother had sent me word not to be uneasy if I received no letters from either of you while you were travelling home, I was satisfied for a time. To entrust any one else with such a delicate mission as that would have been out of the question. It rested between him and myself and I determined that, in the event of his being detained any longer, I would set out myself on the 30th. He came; but I had gone already, in consequence of a letter received that morning—a letter from you, telling me to come as quickly as possible, because there was some report against me, that your mother would otherwise believe. There was no date inside, but the post-mark was ‘Florence.’ I set off at once on horseback, rode across country to Lyneham—the pace killed my horse—and jumped into the

express as it was moving off. I travelled day and night to Florence, found that you had gone, and followed you to Rome."

Ida started up, and her eyes looked piteously into his for an instant. Then she walked up and down the gallery without speaking.

Everard rose when she left her chair, and remained where he had risen, struggling with himself to look away from her.

"To Rome!" she said at last. "To Rome—and again made too late. Too late, and through *him*—I know it was. The letter you received then was the letter I asked you about. I wrote it on the 12th of October. He must have changed it with the other, and kept it back, and posted it afterwards—posted it just in time to be too late. Do you see the calculating treachery, the abominable false-heartedness, the diabolical refinement of cruelty?"

"Don't ask me that," said Everard hoarsely. "Let it be sufficient that, by the mercy of God, his soul is not on my conscience, as it nearly was then. Don't force me to plead for him as your husband. He is, and I must accept the fact, you the duties; but I am not called upon to do more, unless it be for your sake, for your good. Tell me if it is so, but spare me if you can."

She heard the words only. The voice, the tones, were lost in the tumult within.

"Plead for *him*?" she said. "If you could do it, do you think that I could listen? You never *would*, never *could* have said so, if you had ever felt as I felt and (will you make me say it?) *do* feel."

"*Do* feel? Ida! Don't tempt me beyond endurance to say what I *do* feel."

"How can I believe you? when my mother told you that she should consider us disengaged, and you said nothing."

"And you were told *that*? And you could believe it? I said nothing, indeed, because she refused point-blank to listen and left the room directly afterwards. In a few minutes I had a note from her, telling me that she had not meant what she said. Elfrida, who brought it, asked me what had happened, and I told her. I should have written

to you about that, and many other things, if I could. You well know why I did not."

"I do. But you never came to see me, when I wrote to say we were going on Wednesday. I walked for two hours between the lodge and the village, waiting for you."

Everard turned away for a moment, and then answered with apparent calmness, "I never received it."

"Again! and *he* was there. Did you never hear, never suspect?"

"I heard long afterwards that it had been mislaid and forgotten."

"And who told you?"

"The person who—forgot it."

"And do you believe that it *was* forgotten?"

"Yes, I did."

"I ask if you *do*: but never mind. I ought to have known, from the letter you wrote to him, that you never did and never could have cared for me. Why did I want to know what became of the others, when this—Do you know it?"

She took two half sheets out of a silver bag that hung from her waist, held them up before him, crumpled between her fingers, and thrust them into his hand.

"I remember writing it," he said, "and copying it. The copy is in that box. I copied it, because I had to refuse him a favour and thought it prudent to place on record the reason why I did so. He had asked me to persuade my little brother's nurse, Charlotte Wilcox, to return to Italy, his servant having already tried to carry her off by force."

Ida's lips became white and rigid. "Then that was the girl in the lane?" she said.

He listened, for the sound was hardly articulate. She pointed to the letter that was in his hand. He ran his eyes over it as far as the words. "*I don't care and cannot see the beauty you speak of.*"

"Who has done this?" he said, and his brow darkened as when the Marquis confronted him in Rome. "There are two pages gone, and the meaning changed in such a way that the thing must have been done on purpose."

While saying this, he had opened the box on the writing table and pulled out the copy. Ida snatched it from him, and read as follows:—

Page 1.

My dear Marquis—

I have been with Sir Richard all the morning, and shall be out all the afternoon ; so that I should have put off answering your letter till to-morrow, had it been a less important one.

The serio-comic affair in the lane was really nothing, as far as I am concerned. The two roughs never hit me at all, and their leader began to squeak as soon as he was touched. The poor thing was frightened, of course, but is not the worse for it.

Second leaf of first sheet, torn off, and missing.

Page 3.

to tell her such a long story in a letter, when I can do so, much more advantageously for your reputation, after her return. Another motive disinclines me to write to her about it. She has had a great deal of worry and anxiety, and, were she to know of this encounter, I am afraid that it would frighten her about me, in spite of whatever I might say to remove the impression. You may set your mind at rest with regard to the reports you speak of in reference to the death of my little brother. Nobody believes

Page 2.

I am sorry to disoblige you, but I cannot use my influence to persuade her to return to Italy, nor can I send her away. Looking at her past history, I can only see that she has a right to my protection as long as she claims it. That protection she shall have.

You are correct about the light you saw one evening in the tower. She was concealed there then, but now lives openly in my house with the servants, and cannot possibly be a cause of suspicion (as you suggest she might) to Miss Dytchley. But I really do not care

Page 4.

them, except perhaps two or three old women in Chase End, who are ready to believe anything against any one.

Sir Richard is recovering fast, and begs me to thank you for your kind inquiries. He was much amused by your news about the red-whiskered man, whose name I must try to remember, now that (as you tell us) he is going to be married, and who has just succeeded to a small property, with a delapidated but remarkably interesting old house on it. Sir Richard desires me to say that he met the lady once at Bramcote,

Second sheet, first leaf.

Blank leaf torn off.

Page 5.

and cannot see the beauty you speak of, but as she seems likely to be a good wife, and her considerable fortune will help to keep up the old place, one must say, according to the adage, "handsome is as handsome does." In great haste,—
Believe me, yours very sincerely
Everard Freville.

Ida read on, to the last word. Then a terrible cry burst from her lips, followed by a low wail that seemed as if it would have no end. The letter fell from her hand and lay for a little while on the floor. But as yet the truth had only struck her like a sudden blow, a shock that stuns where it reaches. It unfolded itself by degrees and grew under the light, as colours come out at daybreak; yet the whole had appeared within the space of a few seconds, that came and went like the quick passing of a dream whose end is the beginning of its realisation.

She threw herself wildly before him, and fell heavily as if she were dead.

"Everard, I shall go mad," she shrieked, as he raised her up, "I must. I have distrusted you, betrayed you, killed you. But if you only knew"——

She shed no tears, but sobbed convulsively in paroxysms fearful to see. He supported her to a chair, bent over her for an instant, and with an effort known to God only, drew back.

"I do know," he said, and his voice trembled so much that no one but herself could have distinguished the words; "I do know. I know all. I never blamed you, even when I knew nothing. How could I, now? I wrote a letter some weeks ago, telling you that I did not and showing the cause. Hubert has it."

"Oh! Why couldn't he give it to me, or let me know where to come for it? I would have travelled from one end of the earth to the other for it. I thought you had deserted me, and I grew so dreadfully wicked. If I had but seen that letter! How could he be so cruel?"

"It was not his fault. I told him to give it later."

"Why later? I don't understand. What could happen to make one time different from another?"

"He was to give it after I was dead. We had been unnaturally divided in life: it was fitting that my last words to you should come from the grave."

She neither spoke nor moved. Her eyes looked up into his for a moment, as if to read his whole meaning; then the colour of her face changed from pale to ghastly white, and its expression became fixed, as if intelligence were being crushed out by the pressure of one thought."

"God help me! She is going mad," he said, "and I can do nothing to save her." The words had escaped in sound, and in escaping warned him that she would hear them. She heard and listened.

"You do," she said, "and always did everything that is right and perfect—everything. It was all my fault, my miserable fault. No, I am not mad now. You have saved me by showing that you care for me still. But is it true what they said? Oh! do try to live. I can't survive you long, and I am too wicked to die. Yes, I am. You don't know what things I have said and thought, and how I turned away from the faith because I would not believe in anything unless I could believe in you, and how hard I grew—worse and worse, till I didn't know myself, and fancied that I believed the dreadful things I said. Everard, do have pity upon me! Don't drive me from you quite. I can't bear it, I can't indeed. I shall go on disbelieving, if you do—I can't help it. I would believe if I could, but I lost the power by that one fatal act. I have been very wicked, I know I have. I see it all so clearly now, and I shall fall into utter despair unless you help me. I made that awful vow recklessly, hating myself and the whole world. I disbelieved in all good because I had lost all hope. There is no hope for me now—no mercy, if you leave me to myself. I cannot be where he is. I told him so after I had seen you, that fatal day, in Rome, when he tried to kill you, when I saw him—yes, I saw him try to murder you before my eyes. I have never spoken to him since, nor ever stood in the same room with him. I sent him a message that evening, to ask which way he meant to go next day as I was going in the opposite direction. He took the hint, and I have never seen him

since. I never will go anywhere near him. Oh! you know it—ask yourself, ask your own heart how could I?"——

"Don't ask me—don't, I implore you," said Everard. "You don't know what you are saying."

"I never, never will go anywhere near him; and if you tell me I must, I shall die in despair. Let me live in some cottage of yours—where I can think that you are near, and see you sometimes, without being seen, as you are riding by. Oh! Everard, Everard, have pity on me! Save me!"

A stifled groan was his only possible answer. Must he let the powers of evil finish their work? Must he desert her because treachery had triumphed? Must all that remained of their one life be destroyed, crushed out, annihilated? Must he turn away from Ida—appealing for protection in her greatest need, by right of her immense love, her blighted life, her sufferings through and with him?

She stood for an instant and fell on her knees before him. He tried to lift her up; but she clung to the massive arm of the carved oak chair, refusing to rise.

"Do believe me," she repeated. "Oh! do, do believe me. Don't drive me from you—I must go mad, if you do. Everard, if you would not drive me to die in despair, have pity on me! Let me be somewhere, anywhere, near you. I care not where it is, if I can only feel that I am near you, and may see you sometimes in the distance. *Do* tell me that I may. I promise not to be in your way."

"*In my way!*" he exclaimed in a voice that seemed literally to pierce the air. "Do you disbelieve still that I am as I was before we were swindled out of our one life? If human will, if human power, if human love—the most passionate and indestructible, could undo what is, no man living or yet to live should divide us for one moment of time."

A tinge of flickering colour was in his face during the space of one emphatic instant, and then faded into deadly white. He turned away and leant over the back of the chair. Ida started up.

"Oh! Everard, what is it?" she said. "Forgive me. Speak to me."

He turned slowly, and when he spoke his voice was as if it came from far off.

"Ida," he said, "this tremendous crisis in our unnaturally separated lives requires that I should lay bare my heart before you. I have to speak in as few words as possible of all that concerns us now. It might be said that I have no right to do so; but, as things are, I have, because you have a right to hear it. I cannot express to you what I feel as a Christian without trying to express what I feel as a man. I say, 'try to express'; because no possible combination of words could describe what I feel for you, with you, about you. Without the grace of the sacraments I should have killed that man or gone mad, and even now, when life is passing from me and I have not an hour to reckon on as probably my own, the struggle is—but let that pass. You asked me to believe you, and I do believe you. I ask you to believe me."

"I do believe you," she said in a voice that was scarcely audible. "Don't think that I can't understand what you feel. I do, indeed. I couldn't be myself if I did not. But oh! Everard, I have killed you—I alone; for it could never have happened, if I had refused to believe the letter, as I ought. Yes—I ought, I ought indeed. I ought to have disbelieved it, if the whole world had sworn that it was true. Don't defend me. There is no excuse for me—none. And yet I should never have done it if I had not loved you so intensely. Oh! what can I do? All is dark and horrible. Is there nothing that I can do to save your life—the life that is so precious, the life that is mine by being yours? Tell me what to do, and I will do it, whatever it may cost. Only try to live. All the doctors tell one that, when the constitution is sound, the mind can do wonders. Do, do try to live!"

"I have done so, and I should do so now for your sake, if I had never tried before: but you must not be deceived about me again, in any way, on any consideration whatever. No, never again."

"No—a thousand times no!" she answered. "Whatever suffering it may bring on me, I must know all. Tell me the truth. I have killed you by being what I am through my own fault, my own mad and wicked folly."

"No," he said: "it was not your fault, not yours. Don't think that."

"But I know it is. I see it. Oh! God, my punishment

is just, but it is more than I can bear. Everard, if I had not neglected your warning, all this would not have been. My mother would have had no inducement to go abroad, and we should have been happy now. But you don't yet know how it happened."

"I do. Elfrida told me about it when I was at Netherwood."

"Yes, but afterwards, while we were in Italy, I sometimes thought of going to the nearest church and asking for a priest, and then I was afraid of its being made a pretext for staying longer abroad. And so, when the trial came, I had no support, no one that I could put confidence in, no one to point out how easy it is to make up evidence against the absent. Oh! what an awful thing it is to put off confessing the Faith, for any cause whatever, when it has once been given to one. It seemed so natural then, but now I see how wicked it was."

"No, not wicked," he said. The act must be measured by the intention, not by the consequences. The temptation not to do is much more subtle than the temptation to do. When one is tempted to do a thing, one sees, as it were, a picture of the act in one's mind, and the likeness is there, though it may be flattered; but not doing is like standing still, which may save us from evil, or keep us as we were, or leave us exposed to greater danger. But it matters little now, comparatively, how far accidents or omissions or mistakes have combined against us. They can do no more, for all has been done; but we can do what is in us to do—the one and only thing that remains. I say 'we' because I cannot find it in my heart to speak otherwise, though you alone can decide and act. Let our life be one still—as far as may be in this world, now so desolate for us both—one in the One Faith taken from you by the falsehood that divided us, one in the One Hope that no man can destroy. We *must* be one in this—the only way that remains for us here, by the only means that can outlast and conquer time, by the only means that can avail when the grave has closed over our immeasurable grief. This is all that remains to us—all. We must face the terrible fact. We must accept the bitter trial, the total destruction of our life's hope on earth. Ida, I should be utterly unable to part from you now, couldn't endure it, *must* break down and say, 'You are

mine, and I cannot live without you,' were it not for the One True Faith which tells me that I—that *we* must endure to the end. The end will be soon. . . . the End that really is the great Beginning—when the All now remaining to us, that seems to be so little, so hard to realise, will prove to be Everything and for Ever."

"Take me where I can learn to understand that we are still one," said Ida. "Take me now. But, no! I am not in a right state of mind. I should be doing it for human love, not for the love of God. If I had only done His will when I might! But now He will reject me. I am too late."

"No. That is the old story, which the devil tells us when we have fallen and seek to rise. The human motive is there of course—how could it possibly be absent from either of us?—but if you ask yourself the question fairly, you will find that the higher motive is sufficient. Suppose yourself at Netherwood, years ago; and suppose that I had died without ever having had an opportunity of expressing any wish about it; and suppose yourself to have seen the truth, and felt the necessity just as you do now. Could you say honestly that the higher motive, which must then have been the only one, would not have been sufficient?"

"No—I see. The higher motive is sufficient. But I am so unfit now. I have no power to fix my mind on God. I am so absorbed in my own misery, and so impatient. I can't—I can't reconcile myself to"—

"We can only accept it as permitted by God, who knows the heart and requires nothing beyond our strength."

"Take me to the chapel," she said. "I should like to see Father Merivale there. Ask him to come. Send after him wherever he is. I must see him."

They left the room together. When they entered the chapel she looked at the holy water stoup, then at him, and said:—

"Won't you give it to me?"

He did, and they knelt side by side.

"Will it do, if I pray with my heart only?" she said. "I can't find words to express what I feel."

"Yes, indeed it will, better than any other way."

"I felt as if it would. Stay by me and help me. But first ask him to come."

He went out by the door that led into the presbytery. Father Merivale, who was just going out on rather urgent business, turned back.

"She—Ida is there, waiting to see you," said Everard. "Of your charity come, whatever you may have to do."

"*Deo gratias!* His prayers have done this," thought Father Merivale as he turned back.

Everard followed him into the chapel and knelt by the side of Ida a few seconds. He then led her to the confessional and returned to his place. How long she remained there he knew not, for the time had no continuity in his mind. It was filled with one long aspiration, whose intense oneness excluded the idea of measure till she returned and again knelt by him. After a while she rose, and going out with him by the principal door, walked slowly towards the gatehouse, where the carriage was waiting.

"You were right," she said. "The higher motive was sufficient. I felt it while I was kneeling with you there. A feeling came over me, so new and yet so natural. I knew it to be the same that I should have felt nine months ago, if I had not turned back when the happiness of our life hung on one act of mine—one little act of will. That feeling has given me strength now, when I have need of it more than ever. I am tearing myself away from you while I am able. Don't let me stay. Only give me your rosary—your own—the one you always use."

Everard took the rosary out of his pocket and put it into her hand, without speaking.

"You are so dreadfully calm," she said. "You frighten me. You are ill. Oh! Everard, Everard! what have I done?"

"Everything for me," he answered in a very low voice, "everything! What you see is but the stillness that marks the end of a great struggle. I can see the same in you. We have both had a great, a fearful struggle—how great no one but God and ourselves can know. We must pray for each other. Pray for me now, and pray for me when I am dead."

"Yes—always, without ceasing while I live: but it will not be for long. I shall see you once more. It will be at Elfrida's wedding. It is right that I should see you there for the last time, there in the little church where I might

have—Oh ! Everard, Everard. It is I that have need of prayers. Pray for "——

The next word broke into a sob that no effort could restrain. One piteously lingering look, and she was gone. He saw her draw the thick veil over her face as she hurried away, and then he saw nothing. He stood under the arch of the gatehouse until the last echo of the carriage wheels had died away in the distance: then he turned, as if mechanically, and walked back to the house.

Half an hour afterwards Hubert rode into the courtyard. Seeing the brown mare led up and down in front of the door, he looked at his watch and said as he dismounted, "I suppose he has just come in. Is he going out again? If so, I shall ride with him."

"His lordship said he was coming out ; but that must be two hours ago," answered the groom. "The mare has been waiting since three o'clock."

"Where is he?" said Hubert, and without waiting for an answer, he ran into the house.

Everard was lying on the floor of the gallery near the western bay, apparently dead. His left arm was stretched out as if he had made some slight effort to save himself. The right lay across his breast. In his hand was a lady's glove: it was Ida's. He had found it on the ground, a moment before he fell, and he grasped it still.





CHAPTER XLIII.



LONG before Mass Ida was in the little church at Netherwood, and remained there long afterwards. Elfrida waited till she came out, and said as they left the door :—

“Ida, what a happiness is this! What has done it?”

“Say rather, ‘*who*’ has——? There is only one who could. I saw him yesterday. I went to confession in that chapel, and then I asked if I might make my first communion without delay—this morning: and Father Merivale told me that, under the circumstances, and being so well instructed, I might. That was partly the reason why I went upstairs after dinner. I must see you alone by and by, for I have things to say that I cannot speak of before others. And then you will tell my father; for until he knows all, he must think—but don’t ask me anything now. Don’t notice me just now.”

“Dear Ida, dearer than ever, I understand you perfectly,” said Elfrida, pressing her hand as they walked on. “You are right, and I think you had better not appear at breakfast. You have had no sleep, I can see, and you want rest. I shall tell my mother so, and come to you after breakfast, when she is writing her letters. Slip upstairs when we go in, and leave the rest to me.”

Further on they saw Sir Richard walking quickly down the road. He appeared to be on the lookout for some one. When he was within twenty yards of them a groom trotted by and pulled up on one side of him. As they approached they heard him say :—

“I couldn’t see Mr. Freville. He was with his lordship. They told me that Dr. Ranston got there by half-past two

this morning. He says he can't tell yet how it will be. His lordship was no better when I came away."

Sir Richard turned homewards, calling out to the groom, who was riding on, "Get the dogcart round as quick as you can."

"We have killed him among us," he muttered to himself. "I shall never get over it. God grant I may be in time to see him alive!"

Elfrida ran up to him, and said: "What is it? Tell me for pity's sake."

"Hubert found him yesterday, between five and six o'clock, lying on the floor of the gallery. It was an attack of the heart. He has not spoken since. I heard it last night, and sent over this morning to inquire. That is all I know."

"How did you hear it? Did Hubert send word?"

"He was going to do so, but the man who went for your parcels to Lynham station saw one of the Freville Chase grooms galloping up, and asked what was the matter. He said he had come to telegraph for Dr. Ranston and had orders to ride on here afterwards. But our man (I forget who it was) said he would bring the message, for the horse seemed quite done. Don't keep me. I am going there as soon as I can get off."

Ida had followed them. "I have heard it," she said to Elfrida with the calmness of one in whose grief there can no longer be a more and a less. "Has he been so before?—I mean on *that day* when he came to me in Rome—too late? Elfrida, if I were not a Catholic, if I had not prayed by his side yesterday in the chapel at Freville Chase, and received the sacrament of penance there, and received the Body and Blood of my Saviour and my God this morning"——

She walked on and presently repeated the words, "Has he been so before?"

"Yes, in Rome," said Elfrida, "and at Freville Chase when he first came home."

Ida drew her veil down as she passed the lodge, and said: "Yes, it first happened on that day, after he had seen me and because he had seen me. "Don't tell me it wasn't so."

"It did," answered Elfrida. "The dreadful journey after that ride"——

"Yes, he told me. But that alone could not have been the cause. It is I who have killed him. You know that ; but you don't know how my letters and his letters and your letters were stolen, and one of his torn in half, to alter the sense, and how"—

"Dearest Ida," said Elfrida, looking at her anxiously, "I can believe it all. I understand only too well how it was, and who did it. But tell me when I come to your room. Don't say any more now."

When they had nearly reached home Sir Richard drove by.

"Oh ! if I could but go in it," exclaimed Ida. "If I might only see him once more !"

"Remember that he recovered in Rome," said Elfrida, taking her by the hand and leading her into the house. "There is more hope now than there was then. You must see that there is, if you compare what he knew about you then with what he knows about you now."

When Elfrida appeared at breakfast and Ida did not, Lady Dytchley, knowing why Sir Richard had gone to Freville Chase, made no remark and continued to do so. After breakfast Elfrida went to Ida's room and heard her most pitiful story. She remained there till twelve o'clock undisturbed ; and then the disturbance lasted no longer than the opening of the door. The visitor was Mrs. Atherstone.

"How very kind of you," said Ida faintly. "I wanted to see you so much. I was going to send a note. You don't know all you have done for me. In consequence of what you said yesterday I went to Freville Chase—you will not blame me for that, will you ?—and I heard all, told all. Here is a copy of the whole letter, his dear letter, as he sent it. See how right you were, how the meaning was changed by keeping back the middle part and making two sentences one, so that my father's innocent little message about a stranger looked like Everard's words about me. Just compare the whole letter with the two half sheets—here they are—and see how it was done."

Mrs. Atherstone read the letter, and then compared the original passage with the united two.

"I expected something of the kind," she said, "Poor dear child ! You have been fearfully tried."

"It was my not hearing from him afterwards, when I had every reason to feel certain that he had received at least the first of my two miserable letters. But don't try to excuse me. There is no excuse. I ought to have trusted him against the whole world. What was the evidence of his handwriting, compared with the evidence of himself as I knew him to be? I tell you, that if I had heard the words from his own lips, I ought not to have believed them. I ought to have said, 'This is not himself. It is delusion. No, no. There is no excuse. none whatever!'"

"My dear, your feeling is natural and good; but I have lived so much longer than you. Confidence in a beloved object is like a canal between high banks: the smallest leak, if not stopped at once, will cause a flood."

"Yes, but it never ought to want stopping, never ought to be. What is the use of certainty, if a breath is to call it in question? It never could have been, if I had not neglected the One Great Certainty. Don't make any excuse for me—please don't. You are so very, very kind, and so wise; but don't, I entreat you. Speak of his wrongs, and how he has borne them—of his perfections, and how they have grown more perfect—of his love, and how I repaid it—of his true heart, and how I have broken it. Tell me that, and I will listen for ever; but don't stab me with kind words."

"I won't indeed—I promise not," said Mrs. Atherstone tenderly. "But you will let me talk of something else. You spoke of having neglected the One Great Certainty, which can only mean the Faith—nothing is so certain as that—and by saying so, inferred that you are not inclined to neglect it now. I am an old woman, and I know what it is to have the Faith, and what it was to be without it. I hope I am right in my conjecture."

This turned the conversation, and kept it up for more than an hour, when it was broken off by the entrance of Lady Dytechley. Mrs. Atherstone then rose, and said to Ida:—

"By the by, I was nearly forgetting my message. My niece, Mrs. Sherborne, is going to visit her sister in Brittany for six weeks. You have been asked there so often, she says; and as they are going, you could go and come back with them. You would be as quiet as possible, and the old chateau would interest you."

"Yes, do go, my dear Ida," said Lady Dytechley. "It would be the very best thing. You would then be returning here about the 1st or 2nd of August, and we should have a nice quiet month before the shooting begins."

"I will," said Ida, "if—if—— Tell Mrs. Sherborne from me how grateful I am to her for wishing to be burdened with me."

Mrs. Atherstone looked at her watch and asked if she might ring for the carriage, but Lady Dytechley begged her with such abject earnestness to stay, that at last she consented. "For," said she to herself, "that great big creature is frightened out of her wits at the ruin she has made, and leans on a poor old woman like me."

During luncheon they spoke at intervals. After luncheon the intervals became more frequent. Lady Dytechley went with them into the library, remained there a short time, and then went out, pleading an engagement.

Mrs. Atherstone stayed till past five o'clock. As she drove away Hubert cantered up to the door, asked where Elfrida was, and springing off his horse, ran in. He caught sight of her and Ida as they were crossing the hall on their way upstairs. Ida guessed who it was, and turning towards him, said:—

"Of your charity, tell me whatever is true about him."

Hubert bowed his head in reverence to her great sorrow. "I have come on purpose," he answered. "I was sent here to see you."

"Tell him," she said, "that I made my first communion this morning. Is there any hope of——? Don't deceive me."

"The doctor has not said so: but I *must* think there is. I have seen him recover before: and there ought to be more reason now—there must be. You have done for him all that is now possible. You have fulfilled the one great remaining wish of his life. He charged me to tell you so. I have brought this letter, which was left with me for you three months ago, to be given later. He wrote it when he was very ill. Happily the cause of its being written has been removed by yourself; but, for that very reason, I thought you would like to have it to-day."

"Thank you. I can't express how much I thank you," she said, clutching it between the fingers of both hands. "And thank you for your kind words, though they stab me."

While speaking she had glided away to the nearest door and before he could answer she was gone.

"Poor, dear Ida!" he said. "What awful ruin they have made! But I have a message to give you from him, and I must go directly. You will understand why I can't leave him. Sir Richard is staying until I get back. The message is that our wedding must not be delayed, not even for one day. He made a great effort to say those words and to give me the message for Ida. He wouldn't let Sir Richard bring the message, because he knew I should like to tell you myself."

"He wishes it, and that is enough for us," answered Elfrida. "But there must be no one here, no rejoicings. We couldn't bear that."

"No, indeed. I told your father so, and he said: 'Of course not. Every one must be put off.'"

He took Elfrida's arm and went with her to the front door, where his horse was waiting.

"You look so pale and haggard," she said, following him as he was beginning to ride away.

"It was only the shock," he answered, pulling up his horse. "I am not tired. I came into the gallery and saw him lying on the floor, to all appearance dead, with Ida's glove in his hand. And then he was eight hours in the same state before Dr. Ranston came, and twelve hours more after that."

"But have you no hope of him now?"

"Sometimes I have. But the cause is permanent, and the effect accumulates. Oh!—If the author of it would only make an act of contrition, and then die of anything he likes. . . . One doesn't wish any one dead, particularly when he is one's uncle, which in this case it is hard to realise; yet one can't help feeling that he only lives to destroy. He might save his soul, if he were to die now, broken down as he must be by the bitterest possible disenchantment. But I am talking wildly—I suppose from a nervous instinct of reaction. God help us all! I really don't know what to say, and hardly dare think at present. It is a hard thing to bear, but for you, treasure of treasures, would be unbearable." He bent down in his saddle, kissed her hand, and cantered away. She stood watching him till he was out of sight, and then went back to Ida.



CHAPTER XLIV



TIME went on at its own unvarying pace, proving and disproving many things in its own quiet way, all over the world. It had tested in Lady Dytechley the precise value of self-assertion under difficulties, in Ida the strength and weakness of human love trusting in itself. It had seen Elfrida rise above her opportunities and the Marquis Moncalvo sink below his, Hubert lose all and gain by losing, Sir Richard become a decent Christian by having practically forgotten to be one at all. With regard to Everard the conclusion had yet to be shown. When Hubert and his bride arrived at Freville Chase from Beynham, a week after their marriage, he came out to welcome them, spoke cheerfully, and said to Elfrida : "I am all right, and all the better for seeing you ; " but there were evident signs of suffering and of effort in all that he did. While they were at Beynham he had, in defiance of himself, not only planned fêtes and dinner parties, to be given in honour of Elfrida, but fixed the days and sent out the invitations. Lady Dytechley took courage from the fact, and almost believed in herself again. To Elfrida it seemed like a last effort, and especially when she saw him ; but, as he had thrown himself into it, she felt that she must do the same, and she did so as soon as he mentioned the subject to her.

"I am so glad that you see the thing as it is," he said, when they met in the gallery before dinner. "But I knew you would. Ranston wanted to persuade me against it ; but he was wrong. It ought to be done, and it will do me no harm. One can't get away from oneself by getting away from other people. You see, there are two reasons for doing it. In the first place the bride must appear in character and costume, and as I am proud of her"—

"For all that isn't her own doing, but yours entirely," interrupted Elfrida.

"Then you had no free will, I suppose," he said, "and you thought your way into the Church without thinking, and saved Hubert in Paris because the driver of a fiacre took you to the Bois de Boulogne. I *am* proud of you, and have reason to be so. And besides, you are a bride, *the* bride, the bride of this house; and the parties must be given in your honour. Then again, I am glad to have this unanswerable reason for showing some hospitality in the neighbourhood—which, but for you, I couldn't possibly do now, nor imagine myself trying to think of doing. Here it is, all written down. It would have been arranged better, if I could have consulted you; but, to tell the strict truth, I was afraid of your making a row, unless it was settled before you heard of it. You see, the invitations to the dinner parties ignore all local weights and measures. Here, for instance, is a man who thinks much of himself and little of this other one—for no conceivable reason except that he bought a larger property out of iron than the other man did out of silk. I have marked him down to take out the other man's wife, and you must make much of him by making more of her. It may help him to appreciate her, not as much as she deserves, but as far as his own measure of things will go; and if it does, he will see the reflection of it in himself. You will be able to make him see it so, I think, for various reasons. First, you have all the qualities requisite. Secondly you have special privileges as a bride. Thirdly, you have extra ones as a very young bride, new in her authority. Fourthly, he and everyone will be kindly disposed, on your account, and on mine. It will succeed, and ought to do good."

"You must give us some lessons beforehand," said Hubert. "I should begin to think that you are a diplomatist spoilt, if you were not so very much more."

"I deny the positive as well as the comparative. Genuine diplomacy is above my grasp; and the other kind, with its doctrine of *faits accomplis* would only entitle me to a high place among pickpockets."

"I say that you have the powers of a genuine diplomatist—an imaginary being now, I suppose, because there is no place for one—and I know that I am right."

The butler came in to say that a person wanted to see Everard about a summons.

"Let me go," said Hubert. He left the room, and Elfrida said :—

"Now tell me what else I have to do."

"Well, there are two people (they are in the list) who dislike each other a good deal, both in kind and in degree. You will have to make them talk pleasantly together."

"I am ready to attempt anything for you : but you must show me how."

"Well, I don't know what they quarrelled about, but whatever it was, people made the difficulty go on by sympathising with one or other of them. You have only to seem ignorant of the fact, bring them together to look at some of the old embroidery work—we must have it put out as if by accident—and lay stress on the unanimity which, knowing very little about it, they will be obliged to express, for fear of committing themselves. You can then lead them on to talk of other things ; and, local good-humour assisting, they will perhaps lay the foundations of friendship and reconciliation."

"You must tell me something first about the embroidery—I am sorry they are ladies—that I may know what to say. But what else have I to do, besides ?"

"To make people aware of their own stupidity by an implied compliment on their wisdom. There is a lady (here is her name) living in a small house on the other side of Exbourne, that hardly any one has called on, except myself, though she has been there nearly two years. She is well-born and badly off, highly cultivated and unassuming, writes charmingly without being sensational or morbid. These qualities in combination are against her. She might be poor, if she were not better born than some of the people who are better off ; or she might be born as she is, if she were not poor. She might be cultivated, or unassuming ; but as she is both, neither are recognised, and her talent goes for nothing. Your plan will be to speak of her confidently and accidentally, as if you, of course, agreed with something expressed, implied or understood. By agreeing with what they never meant you will make them agree with what you do mean. She has two daughters, who are comfortably above the average in every way, faces included. They are

clever but not original, talk agreeably without going beyond anyone's range, play Wagner's music of the future with alarming emphasis, and are sufficiently plastic in their likes and dislikes to amalgamate with the majority—which is the first condition of being popular. Everyone will like them, without your taking any trouble about it beyond saying who they are. And now I have given you enough of this for one evening. Suppose we put it by now, and go on with the list some time to-morrow. By the by, here is one of her books."

"I should like to read it, as she is coming," said Elfrida.

"Do, and show that you have read it. Authors are too often supposed not to care for that sort of notice; but they care for it very much, particularly those who write fiction or poetry. They are necessarily sensitive, or they couldn't deal with feelings and passions, and they think much less of themselves, as a rule, than people give them credit for. Self-esteem is, no doubt, a very comfortable quality to possess, and may help a man to write a one-sided political pamphlet; but it isn't compatible with the poetic character, especially in a woman. Well, then, to-morrow we shall have to work away down the list, and see what the other people are made of. Then there are the garden parties. I don't know whether I shall be thought mean; but my notion is, that they shouldn't be done expensively. I can't see what *raison d'être* champagne cup and lobster salad can have between luncheon and dinner; but I do see that the fashion of making such parties cost as much as possible is foolish and mischievous, a spur to extravagance and swagger, and an impediment to sociability. And then there is the big *fête* to consider, which must be the first; on account of the hay-making; but that is to be so big and inclusive, that discordant notes, if there are any will be lost in the mass of harmony, as they are, in a limited degree, when the faithful take it into their heads to bawl the Litany at Benediction. We have only to amuse them and make them feel at home."

"And they will," said Elfrida. "People all do here."

"Still at it?" said Hubert, coming in. "And I have missed half the instruction."

"And make them feel at home," repeated Everard in a dreamy way, "and I think they will, of their own accord."

One likes to make people happy, if one can, however little. One can do so little for any one."

"There is that strange transparent paleness again," thought Elfrida, "and worse than I have ever seen it."

"I am afraid you have begun to exert yourself rather too soon," she said. "Wouldn't it be better to put off these parties a little? There is plenty of time. We are only at the beginning of June, and some of the people who are in the list of the dinner parties won't be out of London till the end of July."

"The dinner parties they are down for are later, and one of the garden parties too," he answered, rousing himself a little. "If they don't begin, you see, they won't end—which you want them to do."

"But if they begin late they will only end later; and what is the harm of that? I don't think you are quite well enough yet."

"Seriously I am. What you see at this moment is nothing but what I have had fifty times at least since I came back from Rome. It will go off presently."

"Yes, but the best way to make it go off is to give yourself rest. No one but you would have dreamt of attempting, so soon after an illness, half as much as you have done."

"I don't see how they could, for there was nothing to attempt. But I hope you won't send me to bed without any dinner. I promise to hold my tongue continually till then; and it may be somewhat behind time, for I expect Father Merivale, who expected to miss his train from Letchester. I am all right now though, as right as possible."

"But that terrible paleness is there still," thought Elfrida; "and I see it so often now."





CHAPTER XLV.



IN a few days the bridal festivities began. The big fête was followed by dinners and garden parties during the course of the next six weeks. Guests from the more distant parts of the country and from elsewhere stayed in the house from two days to a week, according to the distance they had come. When the last batch of these had gone there was to

be an interval.

"I had hoped you would have some rest after all that you have done, and done so completely," said Elfrida to Everard at breakfast on the following morning; "but I am afraid that something troubles you—something in that letter."

"There is no reckoning on the amount of trouble that stupidity entails," answered Everard. "It affects everything except itself. In spite of plans and written directions, they are blundering about the building at Beynham. I don't like to act against Ranston's advice, after all that he has done for me; but I really must go there and see about it."

"Not yet, not yet, I entreat you. Hubert and I can go—go at once. To-day if you like. You have only to tell us what it is."

"Well, if you are not tired"—

"Not the least. I have had plenty of rest since yesterday morning. I was only thinking of your birthday. Could we get it done, so as to be able to return before that? I am afraid not. The 6th of August is so near."

"Is that all? The matter is so important that, if there is really no other impediment, I hope you will go to-day. Besides, there is time enough between this and then. You

have only to send for the builder, point out the mistakes, and remain just long enough to see them rectified or fairly started on the way to being so. There can be no question about them, for I have written everything down ; I can put all the papers into a leather box in two minutes. I will go and see after it now."

"I don't like going," said Elfrida, when he had left the room ; "but there is no help for it. He would go if we didn't."

"I don't so much mind going this time," said Hubert. "He is so very much better, and more himself than he has been at all since—the beginning of it."

"Yes—much better ;" she answered. Her eyes were turned away and fixed on the ground.

He listened for more, but she remained silent.

"What is it ?" he said. "You say he is much better, and yet"—

"He is too much better, and has become too quickly better. And there is that far-off, abstracted look in his eyes—I saw it first long ago, and I see it now so often—and the faint pink colour which comes and goes, and that transparent paleness, which never quite leaves him now. One cannot feel satisfied, knowing why it is and why it all must be."

"Then we will not leave him. I can't hear of it—we can't. The building must take its chance."

"No, we mustn't think of that. It would distress him. He would go himself, which would be worse beyond all comparison. We must get through it as quickly as possible. And poor Ida is to come back from Brittany to-day with Mrs. Sherborne. They are expected to arrive at Hazeley about five o'clock, and I should like to have ridden over to see her. I must send a note."

"Here are the plans and the rest of it," said Everard, coming back into the room. "I can show you in a few minutes where the mistakes are. I don't think you can get off comfortably till after luncheon. I see there will be a train at half-past three ; but that would bring you in so late. Hadn't you better wait till to-morrow ?"

"If we go to-day, we shall gain a day," said Elfrida, "and we can see the man to-morrow, if you or Hubert write now to appoint him. And then we shall come back a day sooner."

"You dear, wise child," he said. "Of course you are right. Then so let it be."

And so it was: When the carriage came to the door, he said absently, "I wish they were not obliged to go. How little one is able to control anything." Then he went with them to the door. As he handed her into the carriage he kissed her forehead, and said, "Good-bye—pray for me, and take care of yourself. Take care of yourselves, and each of the other: but you do and will always. God bless you, Hubert. I shall see you again soon. Good-bye. Let me have a line to-morrow. Drive on."

His eyes were fixed on Hubert wistfully as the carriage drove away. When it had passed the gatehouse he turned and went back into the house.

Meanwhile Mrs. Roland was on the lookout behind the *portière*, and Anne was obtruding fragmentary remarks.

"But it's different now," she said. "Didn't he go and break into a cottage? That's burglary. And didn't he carry off Charlotte Wilcox? That's—I forget what it's called, but he could be transported, I know that. Joe Timson that lived by the"—

"He didn't, I tell you," said Mrs. Roland. "He's bad enough for anything, but he wasn't anywhere near at the time."

"Well it was his man then, and he ought to be took up, all the same. My lord is a magistrate, and can't help signing a warrant when they are brought up like that."

"No, he can't be brought up. That isn't it."

"Leave him to see about that. There now—there's my lord coming in. He'll be going out to ride presently, and then you'll wish you'd done it."

"If I could but tell him without saying who it is!" thought Mrs. Roland. "If I could only keep that dreadful name from him! Just the very worst thing for him to know. But he must know it."

"He'll be gone out presently," said Anne, confronting her with rounded eyes and pointing to Everard, who had walked up to the table where hats and riding-whips were many.

"But is Sandford quite sure that he saw him."

"Yes, he said he'd swear to it before all the judges and juries in the land, though he *did* look ten years older. He's

been stopping at the Red Lion in Exbourne, all by himself, without a servant or anything; and we know he can't be come about here now for no good. Yes, ten years older—but that's his conscience, what he's got of it, a-keeping on at him all the time. And you may depend of it, he's trying for a chance to shoot at his lordship behind a hedge."

"That will do, now," said Mrs. Roland. "I know my duty. There is a proper time for everything."

She pushed the *portière* aside, and walking up to Everard as he was turning away, said:—

"My lord, I must ask for a few moments before you go out. I can't put it off—indeed I can't."

"And why should you put it off?" he answered smiling. "What is it? You look troubled."

"Oh! my lord—I had rather do anything than say it. That wicked monster is about here; and when people have injured the good, they hate them all the more."

"Is he? Don't be alarmed. He has done the worst that he could do against me, and can do no more."

"Please, my lord," said Anne, who had been advancing unperceived, "he might shoot behind a hedge. Oh! do have him took up for a vagrant."

"Well, you see, I am afraid I have no power to do that: but I can make enquiries."

"It was Sandford saw him, my lord, and he's at the Red Lion in Exbourne," said Anne, retiring gradually and disappearing behind the *portière*.

"I can ask Sandford about it, then, and find it all out," said Everard. "There is nothing to alarm you. One can easily get rid of any well-known man who skulks about, simply by letting him know that he is known to be doing so. Are you comforted now?"

"Yes, my lord, yes—I am. But do take care."

He went out, and she stood watching him from a window of the hall till he had passed out of sight.

"He has shown me what to do," thought Mrs. Roland, "and it shall be done this very day. I shall keep a man on horseback, and another on foot, following the Marquis, and waiting for him, and dogging his steps wherever he goes. I can get rid of him very soon, I warrant. I don't mind that, now I know what to do. It's that dear child—for so I always think of him, in a way, though he's such a man, every

inch of him, that you don't see the like. It's what I see in him that makes my heart sink. I don't like the way he said 'Is he?' when I said who it was. He looked and spoke as though he had gone through it all, and was near the end. God's Holy Will be done! But it breaks my heart."

Everard went to the stables, but only to order the brown mare. When she was led out, Sandford, after some visible hesitation, said:—

"The roads are very bad Exbourne way, my lord, and very middling all about, regular broke up with the dry weather. There's a deal better riding in the Chase."

Everard understood the nature of the warning, and answered readily:—

"Yes, the roads are not fit to ride on just now."

But he rode in the direction of Exbourne.

Sandford, who had saddled a horse beforehand, mounted and followed him at a distance, weighted, as to his coat-pockets, with a brace of old yeomanry pistols in which there were heavy charges of duck shot.

Everard, all unsuspecting of these defensive preparations, rode down the Chase in company with his own thoughts, or rather his own purpose expressed.

"I can but try to save the miserable creature," he said to himself; "and judging by the message that Ranston brought me from him, I think there is just a chance. People will call it Quixotic, perhaps, if not something less dignified. They are welcome to say so. A soul is worth more than their opinion. If I had never been taught to look below the surface of things, I might get out of it by supposing that a soul so degraded is incapable of rising from the abyss in which it has sunk itself. But what right has any one to suppose that, knowing how often he himself has fallen and risen, and how much deeper he might have fallen, if he had been as unprotected as so many others are? To say of any one that he cannot rise, is to despise him; and such contempt is a feeling composed of ignorance, laziness and ill-nature. God, who alone has the right to despise, does not. As Archbishop Ullathorne says (whether quoting, or not, I don't remember, but it sounds like his own), 'God despises no soul, however degraded, because He sees its capabilities.' Good and evil hold alternate sway over this wretched man; and evil, being privation, decreases the

good more and more, the longer it actuates him. I may or may not be in time, but there was no earlier time to choose. . . . He may have spoken falsely to Ranston, out of mere shame, and have come here in a spirit of reckless revenge. What if he has? . . . Is life so pleasant now, that I should shrink from an act of charity, to prolong it a little? Perhaps I am the least likely of all men to succeed; for, in relation to me, he is the injurer and the injured—by his own act, the injured by a retributive disappointment that he now knows to have been certain from the date of his pseudo-triumph. But there is no one else to try, and I must and will see him, however he may take it. How shall I tackle him? What shall I appeal to first—his heart, his soul, or his sense of having a stronger will than his own to deal with? That will depend on how I find him disposed; but I must think over it, and consider what I may have to say."

It was a market-day at Exbourne, and several farmers, including two of his own tenants, were standing in front of the Red Lion. He spoke a few words to all of them, and then calling for the landlord, said, "Isn't there a gentleman staying here—a stranger?"

"Yes, my lord: but he don't show much. I can't make him out—only that he's a gentleman. He doesn't give his name, and there's nothing on his luggage."

"I thought so. The fact is, I wanted to see him, whoever he is."

"Well my lord—of course, if you wish it, though he he gave me strict orders not to admit anybody. But he isn't in just now, and won't be much before nine o'clock—that's when he comes in and dines. He stays out all day; and where he gets his luncheon, or whether he has any, I can't tell, nor where he goes to."

"Very well, then. I shall come again at nine o'clock this evening. Don't say anything about my coming."

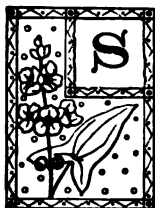
He then talked a little more to the farmers, and rode away.

"I wonder what my lord wants with him," thought the landlord, as the brown mare turned the corner of the market-place, swishing her tail at the flies.

Everard was thinking of the day on which he had first been warned against the Marquis Moncalvo. "It was the beginning of the end," he thought, "and the anniversary is to-day."



CHAPTER XLVI.



SOON after eight o'clock the landlord of the Red Lion began to be on the look out first for his mysterious lodger, and afterwards for Everard.

There's a something up," he thought "or my lord wouldn't turn out at this time of day, ill as he has been, to see one that don't want to be seen. And he looked as if he didn't mean to be trifled with, and he won't. They found that out, those chaps did, last autumn, when he settled them in Gravel-pit lane"—

"What's up now?"

The question was addressed aloud to his wife, who had just come downstairs with a receipted bill in one hand and money in the other.

"The chambermaid and the boots will wish there was something like that up every day," she answered. "He's going to-morrow, and he's paid his bill to the end of the week—and this is what he has given them."

The landlord winked a general assent, but did not commit himself to an opinion.

Everard, was then on his way, and Sandford, with the yeomanry pistols in his coat pockets, was following unobserved.

The Marquis Moncalvo had returned earlier than usual to his place of concealment. It was a little, low sitting-room with a papered ceiling, two chairs of shiny horsehair, a rush-bottomed arm-chair inclining forwards, a stuffed fox on the top of a highly varnished cupboard, two small oval mirrors, three coloured prints in mahogany frames hanging

on a flowered paper, and a rickety round table on which was a tight cover of American cloth. Dinner had been brought in, and taken out untouched. A writing-case was before him, and three or four letters just sealed were on it. He was so much altered as to have passed out of average remembrance. There were streaks of grey in his hair, lines and hollows in his cheeks; but illness might have caused the one, and in the twilight you would scarcely have noticed the other. Those were not the changes that emphasised and quickened the action of time. The measure and mark of what he had become was to be seen in the expression of black despair that possessed every feature. His face was pale, with a ghastly greyish hue pervading it like a shadow. His eyes had the appearance of looking inwards, as when the mind has no object beyond its own picture of itself. His lips were stiffly compressed, and their compression was continuous rather than fixed, indicating a forced action of the will, deliberate but not spontaneous. After a while the pressure of that inner force compelled utterance, and he spoke his thoughts in an undertone with excessive articulation.

"You are avenged at last," he said, "and the more so because you have not sought it. You will triumph in that, as in every other way. You have triumphed over me in strength, in generosity, in acuteness, in reputation, even in the turn of events. And now you will triumph in the rightful possession of all that you lost and I never gained. But this—the last—the greatest, the one thing without which you find all others powerless to give happiness, will not be your own work, it will be mine. I shall die owing you nothing."

He opened a pistol-case that lay on the table, and taking out a revolver, loaded it, muttering between his set teeth, "I am doomed, and it matters not how nor how soon it comes. There is no right and wrong for one who has no hope. A little sooner or a little later. The end must come, and the end must be—what I have made it. I go to meet the inevitable that is unseen, rather than face the inevitable that I see before me. I go to the unseen in despair, that last corrupted remnant of the faith I once had—but I leave the visible, having cancelled my debt to him. I shall owe him nothing. Owe! What do I owe to

him? Has he not ruined me in this world and made the next a savage mockery? What is it to me that he acted without malice? What are his intentions to me? What do we know about the intentions of others, when we hardly know our own? We know nothing but facts, and only know them to be facts when they make us happy or unhappy. I am ruined through him and his, ruined for ever; and shall I be so weakly enthusiastic as to make my despair his gain, his happiness, his triumph? Yet it must be. My will is not my own: it drives me on. I have seen her at last, seen her turn away from me with horror and contempt. I could bear the loss of my own reputation, and the stain on my name, for I hate the world now, and am indifferent to its opinions: but that gesture of contempt from a woman, and she nominally my wife—that look of shrinking disgust, of bitter and womanly scorn—has made me intolerable to myself. That mockery of marriage marked me down as lost, and the end is Now.”

Colour came into his face, an unnatural light into his eyes, a strange kind of exhilaration into his mind and senses. He grasped the revolver, held it firmly before him a few moments, and had just begun to turn the muzzle deliberately round, when it was knocked on one side, wrenched out of his hand and thrown on the floor. The action had been so quick and overpowering that it was done before he became aware of any other presence than his own. Starting up, he rushed at the intruder blindly, was at once forced back into his chair, and saw Everard standing by him, the very embodiment of power and pity. He shrank from the impression and, for a moment, looked away. Then he rose and said haughtily:—

“You have taken me by surprise. Let the advantage be to you what it may be worth in your own estimation; but if you have the feelings of a gentleman, you will understand it to mean that the world is not adapted to hold us both. Let me hear to-morrow that you understand what I have said. In the meantime do me the favour to go.”

“Not till you have made up your mind to speak and act like a Christian,” said Everard. “Sit down and listen, for I have a right to be heard and I mean to be heard. I have just saved you from a shameful death and eternal perdition: in return you wish to take the life I risked for you. Had I

not interfered when I did and as I did, you would by this time have appeared before Almighty God, charged with the guilt of self-murder. What the result of that must be you know as well as I do. You would have been judged; and your body, awaiting its horrible reunion with a lost soul, would be lying in a room redolent of spirits and stale tobacco, to be examined by the coroner. I have saved you from a shameful death, and you wish to take my life. I have saved you from the certainty of eternal perdition, and you are trying to insure it for me. I spared your life when you were doing your utmost to kill me, and you seek my life when I have just risked it to save yours. I spared you while defending myself in the extremest heat of a just anger, and you insult me by insinuating that I have taken a cowardly advantage of you now. I have forgiven you—forgiven you at a cost that God alone knows—as black a deed of treachery as ever was committed, and you, who have nothing to forgive, cannot be satisfied as long as there are any remains of the life that you have ruined. You will not be kept waiting long. Try, for your own sake, to moderate your malice while you can do so without shame and remorse.”

“You have made me feel both,” said the Marquis in a tone of excessive emotion. “All you have said is true, and you might have said much more with truth and justice. I have behaved as badly as any man could behave to another, and you have behaved like what you are, a hero and a saint. There is only one reparation in my power.”

He stepped suddenly back and passing by the corner of the table, made a dart at the revolver on the floor. Everard threw himself between, and again forced him back into the chair.

“You are overexcited,” he said gently. “Sit still a while, and hear me out. You owe me that.”

“I do,” gasped the Marquis, making no further resistance. “I owe you that and much more. I owe you the happiness of which I robbed you. Your generous interference has prevented the only reparation that is possible. Had you been less quick or less powerful, that nominal tie—that mockery of marriage—would have been broken, and she would be free. You are worthy of happiness—no one so much, and your happiness would be the means of making

others happy. Nothing can save me now. Your efforts to do so are heroic, in the highest possible sense of the word, but they cannot prevail against the fate that I have made for myself."

"Nonsense! What you call fate is nothing but your own disordered will. The devil, of course, tries to persuade you that you have no choice, for his business is to destroy souls as much as he can, and lies are his weapons; but he cannot, unless you co-operate in the deception. You know, as well as you know anything, that a soul cannot be lost otherwise than by its own wilful fault, and therefore that the dark doom you imply is a solemn absurdity. God has preserved you twice in spite of yourself"—

· "In spite of myself—yes. But it was you who"—

"And who insured my coming here soon enough, or even knowing that you were in the neighbourhood? My horse was brought round a little before the time, and it happened that I was ready. But for that, I should have been too late. You want to make reparation, and so you can, if you will, but not by making me the cause of your dying in mortal sin. Ask yourself whether any Christian man, however poor a specimen he may be, could accept such restitution as that."

"But what else can I do? There is no other way of restoring what I have unjustly taken."

"Speak reasonably, or shall I be compelled to call in two doctors and a magistrate, that you may be taken care of, as having twice tried to commit suicide and expressed a determination to try again. To give what belongs to another, in order to restore something else, is not restitution, but robbery. If a man who had stolen a sum of money were to rob the Bank of England in order to pay it, would you call that restitution? And yet the robbery would be as nothing, compared with what you propose to do; for the wealth of the British Empire, which the Bank of England represents, is limited, but you would cheat Almighty God out of a soul that He has redeemed at an infinite price. Your life belongs to Him, and you have no right to take it. Our Lord was born in a stable, lived in poverty and contempt, suffered, taught, sweated blood in contemplating your sins, died in agony of a broken heart to save your soul; and you would deprive Him of it—of the right which He could command, if He had not given you the high privilege of free will. Let me

have no more of this unworthy, this contemptible, this drivelling nonsense. You must come to Freville Chase. You must come now—with me. You want to make reparation for the evil that you have done, the evil that you would not have done if you had not been led away from the duties of the Faith. The only reparation you can make is to save your soul, and you know how to begin that. You know what you ought to do, and you long to do it; but the devil is putting all sorts of excuses into your mind, and I don't mean him to succeed, if I can help it. One effort, and you will have freed yourself. That effort you can and must make. I will not leave you till you have."

"Ask me to do something that is possible. I cannot go to Freville Chase, and I cannot be reconciled to the Church. It is too late."

"Then you refuse to make the only possible reparation, the reparation that I ask for and you promised?"

"No. Don't say that I refuse. I am too late, and therefore it is impossible. I have gone too far: I have abandoned the Faith too long. In such dispositions as mine, it would be mere hypocrisy to go through the form of being reconciled to the Church."

"Of course—and sacrilege too, if you wilfully persist in them, against knowledge and conscience, but not otherwise. And what has that to do with your coming to Freville Chase?"

"Everything; for your object in asking me there is to bring me back into the Church, and as that cannot be, I should only place you in a most painful and equivocal position for nothing."

"Leave me to manage the position. I ask you to come, and I don't ask you to do impossibilities."

"I beg you to ask me something else, anything else that I can do for your sake. Think for a moment. Consider Hubert."

"Hubert and Elfrida are at Beynham. Only tell me when you will be there, and I will meet you along the avenue, and send the fly on with your luggage that no one may see you arrive. Come! Let me see you begin to pack up. I will help you to do it. Give me a start of ten minutes, and you will find me in the avenue."

The Marquis again started up from his chair, but not as

before. He stood quite still after he had risen, and the expression of his countenance was such as Everard had never yet seen in it.

"I will go to Freville Chase," he said. "You have fairly conquered me. I cannot resist you. Your noble forgiveness has overpowered me."

"Say rather, the Grace of God and your own better feelings," answered Everard, unloading the revolver and putting it into its case. "If I have done anything to encourage you, well!—so much the better for us both. Suppose you pack a few things, and let me send for the rest in the morning. I had better get home soon."

In a few minutes he ordered the fly and mounted the brown mare. The night was dark, and the loose flints were many, but he reached home in time to meet the Marquis in the avenue. He little thought that Sandford, with his yeomanry pistols in his pockets, had followed him to the Red Lion, stood outside the door during his interview with the Marquis, and followed him back to Freville Chase.

Seeing Mrs. Roland in the shadow of the *portière*, as they passed through the hall, he left the Marquis in the gallery and went back.

"Don't be frightened," he said. "I found him in despair, attempting his own life. I prevented it twice, and got him to listen, after a great deal of trouble. In charity I couldn't do less than bring him here and try to get him to his duties—particularly after the message he sent me by Dr. Ranston."

"Yes, my lord, if you were somebody else and all was different," said Mrs. Roland.

"But, you see, there was nobody else, and I felt bound to do it."

"Not to go after him, at such a risk to everybody, riding off to Exbourne at this time of night," she answered in a tone of respectful admiration. "It was more than anyone else would have done, to let him come inside the house at all, when there are plenty of places where he could go to his duties. It's ever so much worse than going to Beynham, ever so much. I wish to goodness you had gone there!"

"But if I had, he would have shot himself. He tried hard to do so, and would, if I had not been stronger than he is."

"So much the worse—to give you all that exertion just now."

"But I assure you that I don't feel the worse for it. I had more talking to do than anything else."

"Well, my lord, it can't be helped, I suppose; but I hope you won't take any more trouble about him now, nor see much of him. I am sure he will have enough to do to prepare for confession, after all these years and what he has done."

"Yes, but I am afraid he is not ready for that yet."

"Let Father Merivale look to that, and see whether he means anything or not, and get rid of him if he doesn't. Promise me, my lord, that you won't be with him much."

"I can hardly promise that; but he can do me no harm now. And if you saw what a wretched state he is in, you would pity him—you couldn't help it."

"I don't deny that, my lord. Who wouldn't pity a poor perishing soul? But it happens at a bad time, just when you are alone."

"If I had not been alone, he wouldn't have come."

"But there is no reason why you should be alone any longer—

"There is indeed. It would never do for my brother to be here with him. He will be gone before they return from Beynham."

Mrs. Roland retired slowly, declining to make any admission. Everard went back to his guest, and found him pacing the gallery with quick irregular strides."

"Your noble conduct," said the Marquis, "has touched my heart more than there is power in words to express. It has made me come here against my will, and would, if it were possible, keep me here as long as you are alone. But you really must excuse me from staying beyond to-morrow morning. The recollections of this place are more than I can endure. But before I go, I wish to tell you some things about myself. They would not take me long to tell, for you know so much about them already; and if it were not so late"—

"Never mind that," said Everard. "I had rather hear it now."

"And I had rather say it now. There will be more time now than in the morning, for I must go early—I must, indeed. I beg you as a favour not to press me to stay. If I were naturally bad, I should stay, for, it would be my best

exculpation before the world ; but I am not. I have been made bad, and I will tell you how,"

"Just tell me one thing first—that is, if you can," said Everard. "Do you know anything about a letter that Hubert had last March, from Calabria?"

The Marquis's pale face crimsoned and then became paler than before.

"Didn't Lady Dytechley intimate to you that he would be better out of the way for a time," said Everard, "and put some sort of pressure on you about the evidence that we were looking for?—and wasn't the letter from Calabria written by the person who took leave to act for you on another occasion?"

"It was. Let me tell you the whole truth."

"Please, don't. I understand it all, and guessed it at the time. But I interrupted you. You were saying"—

"My father," said the Marquis, "died when I was a boy. I have no recollection of my mother. After leaving college, I fell under the poisonous influence that you know well, though it has never touched you. I never had anything to do with Italian Freemasonry, nor indeed with any ; but through false friends, men whom I ought not to have known, I imbibed liberalism enough to destroy me. I neglected the practice of religion, became careless of its principles, of course fell away in morals, and spent so much money that, in about three years I was in very embarrassing difficulties. That servant of mine was aware of it, and he knew that my sister had inherited a considerable sum of money from an uncle. He thought it a good opportunity for enriching himself at will by getting me into his power, and he succeeded. Unhappily I was absent a day and a half. The deed was done during that time. Had it been proposed to me it would never have been done ; but, when I heard of it, the two nurses were leaving Alassio, taking Hubert with them, and then I gave that negative consent which has been my ruin. I argued with myself as a man argues whose principles have been loosened at their foundations. Was I to follow them, only to make a terrible scandal, have the credit of being a frightened accomplice, and deprive Lord de Freville of an heir, who, after all, was a Freville? My difficulties were pressing and immediate, and I tolerated the sophistry as people now tolerate the occupation of Rome—because it

was an accomplished fact. While I hesitated the two nurses went away with the child, and I said, 'It is too late now.'

"And so it was at first," said Everard. "By neglecting the practice of religion you had lost grace, and by losing grace you had weakened your defences. A Catholic who has rejected the supernatural has paralysed the natural virtues in him, and has less power of resistance than a heathen. All the misfortunes that you have brought on yourself and on others came from that. I will even venture to say that you couldn't help acting then as you did. Your will was unequal to the occasion, simply because you had made it so. You know that I am telling you the truth: you have virtually confessed it: yet you go on consenting to the cause, hugging your chains, letting yourself be dragged on to perdition with your eyes open. So long as you continue consenting to the sole and certain cause of all that you so bitterly and with every reason regret, so long you are consenting to the effects, defending them, making them your own, morally repeating them. Just think of that, think it over quietly at your leisure, before you decide on leaving this house to-morrow morning and throwing away what may be, and probably is, your last opportunity."

The Marquis drew a quick breath, and a deeper shade of melancholy came over his brow; but he evaded the question.

"You are right," he said. "All the misfortunes that I have brought on myself and others came from that one unpardonable hesitation."

"I didn't say that," said Everard. "I said that the hesitation and its consequences came from your giving up the practice of religion."

"I had no peace after that day," said the Marquis, "for it was too late to undo what I had done; yet it haunted me day and night. I was in his power, and had to tolerate his villanous attempt in the lane. I was in the power of Charlotte Wilcox, and never knew when or how she might justifiably use that power. Unable to recover myself, I fell lower, but not contentedly. I longed and aspired after better things always—it was partly the cause of what followed. I wish you to know all about that, without any reservation."

"Spare yourself and me," interposed Everard. "I understand it all. Let us talk of something else—anything else."

"Yes. Only let me say that I misunderstood you about it."

"I know—I understand it all."

"I thought so. I only wish to say that, had I known what I now know about you, I should not have been led into the shameful act of treachery that makes me hate myself. Lady Dytechley deceived me—you *must* hear that."

"There is no necessity for it. I know her enough and too much."

"Yes, but not what she said to *me*. She said that the marriage never should be, no matter what she did or went through to prevent it. She said that neither cared for the other really, and that you had virtually acknowledged"—

"I know exactly what she would have said. I know it as well as if I had been present. But I am afraid that I must say good-night. I hope you will think better of your determination to go early to-morrow morning."

"I would, if it were possible. Don't I entreat you, give me the pain of refusing"—

"I wish to save you the pain of *having* refused," said Everard, ringing the bell. "My life hangs on a very slight thread. I can't take you to your room, for they won't let me go upstairs. You mustn't mistake muscular strength for soundness. I haven't got over the illness I had in Rome—I never shall—and I am liable to die suddenly at any moment. Five doctors have told me so. Dr. Ranston even forbids my going to Beynham."

The Marquis trembled and turned very pale.

"I never heard that till now," he said, "now, when I know that I am the cause—now, when I have learned at last what you are and what I have done. The sight of me—my presence here *must* be dangerous to you. It *must*. Let me go at once—to-night."

"Not if I can by any legitimate means induce you to remain. The best thing you can do for me is to stay, and think, and look into yourself, and pray hard. Pray for me if you won't for yourself. And now, once more, good-night."



CHAPTER XLVII.



UBERT and Elfrida were detained at Beynham nearly a week. On the fifth morning, at eight o'clock, they went to hear Mass in the domestic chapel hastily fitted up for the late Lord de Freville, who had more than once been carried into it and, on the day of his death, received the Holy Viaticum soon after Mass was said there. As the little church was still in progress, this chapel-room was used for the mission. There was no resident priest yet, but one came from a distance on Sundays and days of obligation, and occasionally at other times. It was a large room, originally intended for a ball-room, but left unfinished. The ceiling was carved, but the walls were still of bare brick, and three of the five windows were bricked up. You entered through folding-doors, out of a large drawing-room. One bricked-up window was at the further end: the two others were on the left side near the entrance. Of the two that were open and finished one was half-way down the room, the other threw light on the altar.

As a chapel it impressed you with the idea of solemnity, thoroughness and preparation. The walls were covered with cloth in the darker parts, in the lighter with tapestry, near the altar with crimson velvet. The altar stood in a recess that formed a sort of sanctuary, and above it, against the bricked-up window, was a very good copy of Francia's *Pietà*, with a background of crimson velvet that hung in graceful drapery over the whole space of wall within. The crucifix was of ivory and ebony, the antependium of white satin, embroidered in gold and the five ecclesiastical colours.

The floor of the recess was covered with a very thick Persian carpet. Facing the front row of chairs to the right was an Early Italian picture of our Blessed Lady, in an antique silver-chased frame, before which a lamp was burning. A subdued light, that melted into the shadow of the velvet drapery, made colour soft, outlines distinct. The whole effect was that of devotional solemnity, artistic truth, fitness of adaptation.

And these were almost the very words that Elfrida used when speaking of it as she passed through the large drawing-room on her way to hear Mass.

"I wish you had heard Everard's directions about it," said Hubert, "when I put the whole thing suddenly before him to settle off-hand, though he had hardly seen the room. I can't imagine why I never told you before, except that we have had so many other things to think of. When I told him what was wanted, and how soon, he said :—' First ask the Bishop, or it can't be done at all. Then have a plain oak altar made. I will write down the dimensions, and the village carpenter can make it. Then take that old Scriptural tapestry from the inner drawing-room, and the cloth and velvet that was used on some occasion or other—I saw it in a lumber room. Put the tapestry where the light comes, and the cloth where it doesn't, and hang the velvet on the three walls of the recess where the altar must be. Get that fine copy of Francia's Pietà, and put it above the altar—it will show well on the crimson velvet. Don't be in a hurry about a statue of our Blessed Lady, or you will get something abominable ; but take the picture I saw in his study (it has a chased silver frame) and hang it between the recess and the inner wall, with a lamp below on a bracket. Don't attempt Gothic in that Early Georgian room. An ivory crucifix will look best in that light, with those surroundings, and a white satin antependium embroidered in the five ecclesiastical colours, lit up by a good deal of gold. You will find silver candlesticks in the house much more suitable than anything you are likely to pick up on short notice.' I followed his directions exactly, and the result has verified every word he said. I only wish he could see it."

Elfrida said nothing, for they were at the entrance and the folding doors were open ; but it came into her mind that this was the day after Everard's birthday—the anniversary of

the day on which the settlements were to have been signed.

Hubert was not remembering the date at that moment, but he was oppressed by an overpowering wish to be at Freville Chase; and the wish grew into a distraction, that tormented him half through the Mass. Towards the end of the Preface he had a sudden impression that some one had entered the chapel and was walking by him. He looked up nervously and saw that it was Everard.

No sight could have been more startling, no event more improbable; but Everard it was, and he appeared to be no worse for coming. He passed close by them, and turning his head a little, stopped for a moment. It was but for a moment, yet in that short space of time Hubert had seen the beautiful smile and felt it upon him. Another moment, and the Sanctus bell rang. Everard passed onwards into the shadow, through a ray of sunlight that glistened on his hair, and knelt on a prie-Dieu that stood in the shade of the two bricked-up windows.

"Just like him—after all, to come so," thought Hubert. "But to travel at night—and yet he looks no worse for it. He hasn't looked so well since"—

At that moment the bell rang, bringing the question to a sudden and decisive end. After the consecration Hubert looked up again, and when the words *Nobis quoque peccatoribus* had been said, he touched Elfrida, pointing at the same time with his prayer-book to the spot where Everard was kneeling. She showed no surprise, and he, by reason of believing in her very much, went on with his prayers quietly, as if nothing particular had disturbed their course. After the blessing he looked up again and saw the chair empty.

"Come out at once, I implore you," he whispered. Elfrida looked surprised, but followed him out. "What can have become of him?" he said.

"Who? what do you mean?" she answered.

"I mean Everard, of course. He was at Mass. Didn't you see him?"

Elfrida made no answer, but the colour left her cheeks.

"I saw him as distinctly as I ever saw anything," said Hubert. "He looked at me. He must be here. Did no one see him come?"

These words were addressed to the servants who were leaving the chapel.

Elfrida burst into tears, and taking his arm, said :

"We must go back directly. He is not here, or I should have seen him—must have seen him."

They hurried on.

"We must catch the half-past nine train," said Hubert, his voice trembling so much that he could hardly speak.

"Why, oh why did we come here"—

They caught the train, and reached Freville Chase soon after twelve o'clock.

When they drove into the courtyard, Elfrida's fortitude began to give way, but without any external sign, except a slight constraint that Hubert would not have perceived if they had been less to each other than they were. That constraint, or rather tension, showed itself even more in him than in her. His eyes avoided every object. His mouth was fixedly closed, as if repressing the utterance of a dreaded truth. When the fly stopped he took her hand, held it in his for a moment, and springing out, rushed headlong into the house. The first living object he saw was the Marquis Moncalvo, coming through the door that led to the chapel.

"Treacherous, ill-omened apostate!" muttered Hubert. "Must I bear this because my mother had the misfortune of being your sister?"

But he looked again, saw the abominated countenance more distinctly, and paused in amazement, finding no warrant there for the anger that he knew to be just. The Marquis came forward, and said in a low voice:—

"Yes!—treacherous, an apostate, and of evil omen: yet I ask you to endure my presence a little while for his sake. I virtually killed him, and he sought me out, saved me from suicide, brought me here, made me be reconciled to the Church. He owed his death to me: I owe my life and more than my life to him. I deceived him, and he taught me to undeceive myself. He died as he had lived. I live to die as I have not lived. I owe both life and hope to him. That was his last work."

Elfrida made one final effort to control the expression of her immense grief, and broke down in the struggle. She sobbed without restraint, and tottered helplessly.

"Come with me," said Mrs. Roland, who had heard the sound of carriage-wheels while in the chapel, and was now standing behind them unobserved. "Come with me," she repeated; and strong in the strength of noble service, she bore her away.

Hubert bowed his head and went on.

"When was it?" he said in a hoarse voice, "and where, and how?"

The Marquis began to answer, but his voice failed more than once. At last he said:—

"This morning, about a quarter past eight o'clock. I telegraphed for you as soon as possible, but I did not expect you to arrive so soon. I had been awakened very early by the sound of a great bell that seemed as if it came from the top of the tower. I supposed that it was ringing for his birthday, which, if I remember rightly, is to-day. I went down to the Chapel some time before Mass, and I found him already there. He went to Holy Communion, and I did so too, owing to him. Just after the last Gospel I saw him get up and try to walk down the aisle. I followed, and supported him till we came into the gallery. Then he stood for a moment in front of the western bay, and looked out. A great change had come over his countenance. The traces of pain and sorrow were no longer there. I had never before seen him look happy. I have never seen any one look as he did then. Directly afterwards I felt him lean heavily on my arm. I laid him on a sofa, and then Father Merivale came in."

"Where is he now? show me."

"There—in the chapel."

The Marquis drew back reverently, and Hubert passed on alone.

The chapel was nearly full. All the servants, except Mrs. Roland, were there, nearly all the congregation, and several people from a distance, many of them belonging to Netherwood. Sir Richard was there, but so aged and altered that you might have doubted his identity.

Hubert saw none of them. When he opened the door he had a sudden impression of people and lights, but only one object of sight. He only saw Everard, lying as if asleep, scarcely paler than when he had seen him last, and so life-like in expression that the reality of his death seemed at first

sight incredible. He wore the black velvet clothes in which he had died. A rosary that he had always carried about him was twined round his fingers. The crossed hands and the crucifix that glittered on his breast were the only immediate evidences that he was dead.

His features had lost none of their living beauty. Sometimes the lips appeared to smile as the flicker of the tall wax-tapers rose and fell, lighting up the crimson velvet cushion under his head and glistening on the draperies of white satin brocaded with gold that covered the couch where they had laid him. One expression only was no longer there, one not essentially his, but acquired and separable—that of accepted suffering, which had passed away with the trials that made it. Where it had once been peace now reigned, profound and permanent.

The crowd that knelt around in the cleared space moved a little way back when Hubert came in. Only one remained. It was Sandford, who, with his grey head bowed over the body of Everard, was unconscious of any other human presence.

Hubert fell forward on his knees close to the pillow, and gazing intently, doubted for a moment. For a moment only. The next he felt and saw that this was indeed death. He felt it in the icy cold of the smooth forehead and the crossed hands; he saw it in the straight lines of the brow, in the fixity of outline, in the absolute stillness, but most of all in the upward look of the closed eyes, and the immense, the complete humility they expressed, as if the vision which no man may behold and live had opened out to the gaze of the soul at the moment of separation from the body.

He saw that, and nothing but that. He was not even aware that Ida had just come in, though she knelt beside him. Stiffened and stupefied, he could neither pray nor make any effort, nor feel his inability to do so. Even the action of grief was suspended till Everard's favourite deerhound, who had slipped in by stealth, came to the opposite side of the couch and after resting his muzzle on the coverlet for a while, put his paw on the dead hand of his master, whining piteously.

This touch of nature broke him down. He staggered up to the spot, coaxed the poor dog away out of the chapel and fell back into the arms of Father Merivale, who had watched and followed him.

The Marquis, wishing to return, had passed through the courtyard to the principal door, and seeing that Hubert was not there, came in. As Ida's face was turned from him, and her head bent down, they were not aware of each other's presence, till he knelt by her side. He saw her, and shrank back appalled, as if the living and the dead were bearing witness together against him. She saw him, and nerved herself up for an heroic effort.

"Stay!" she said in a penetrating whisper. "I must speak, and you must listen. Here, in the presence of God, and in the presence of him whom we both betrayed, I forgive you as I hope to be forgiven, and I ask you to forgive me the wrong I have done you. Let our last meeting be here. Let us part in these dispositions."

He said nothing, but inclined his head with a reverence and humility more expressive than words. A few minutes afterwards he rose and knelt further off.

Hubert had broken down as a man of strong will and vigorous constitution does, when his overstrained forces give way; but as soon as animation was restored, he again became unnaturally calm and went with Father Merivale into the gallery.

"I want to hear about him," he said, walking up to the writing table in the southern bay. "It almost seems as if he had known what would be. There are no letters or papers lying about. Everything is in order. It all looks finished and put away."

"I think he did almost know—had a strong impression. Yesterday evening I was alone with him for some time. The Marquis Moncalvo had gone to the chapel. At dinner he had been quite himself, and more than himself—brilliant, original, inexhaustible. When the Marquis left the room, he smiled as of old—the wonderful smile that nobody who ever saw could forget, and said to me:—

"'I rattled away, to keep his attention off himself till he had to prepare for confession.'"

"'You did wisely and well,' I said, 'you have done wonders. I had no hopes of him at first.'"

"'I suppose not,' he said absently. 'But people see the nearness of the end more clearly in others than in themselves; and sight is suggestive.'"

"I made no answer, for I thought it better that he should be quiet. Presently I heard him say :—

" 'Better as it is—better for him perhaps.'

"I asked him what was better.

" 'I was wishing that Hubert could be here,' he said, 'but it can't be. He has been the best brother that any man ever had, in every way and invariably.'

"I asked him if he had any particular reason for wanting you sooner than you were expected. He said, 'None—except that I feel my life to be so very uncertain ;' and then he asked me to give you a message from him if he should die while you were away. He said, "Tell him that I wished very much to have seen him once more—to have had him near me then. Tell him that a truer friend or a better brother than himself could not be. Tell him that he has been the greatest possible comfort to me always—especially so in troubles that have been, at any rate, as much as I could bear—and that I have unlimited confidence in him for the future. And I ask you,' he said, 'in the event of my dying while he is away, to take the gold crucifix that hangs on a chain round my neck, and give it to him yourself as soon as you can, and say that I wish him to wear it constantly, as I have, and my father before me. He knows it all, for I told him of it in Rome. There is, as you know, a piece of the True Cross inside.'

"I was alarmed, and asked him to let me telegraph for you. His face brightened for a moment, but then he begged me not to do it on account of the Marquis ; and expressed the heroic resolution as lightly as if it were nothing. He only said, 'No, please don't. One would like to finish up that business without giving any distraction to the person most concerned.' Then a faint colour came into his cheeks and faded away as quickly. 'I hope you will see Ida,' he said, 'and say what you can to comfort her. She will not live to require it long. Try to see her as soon as you can.' I pressed him again to let me telegraph for you, but he shook his head. 'No,' he said. 'It is better not until all is completed. He goes the day after to-morrow, and they come back the same day.' He then spoke of other things, and soon after I had to go to the chapel. When I returned he had gone to his room. Mass was at half-past seven this morning, because I had to go out early. He received Holy Communion with

the Marquis. They were the only two. It was his last act. As I was coming down the altar steps after Mass, I saw him get up and leave the chapel. He was paler than I had yet seen him, and walked with evident effort. The Marquis gave him his arm, and went out with him. I followed as soon as I had unvested, bringing the holy oils with me (for I dreaded the worst) and found him lying on that sofa near the western window. He was evidently dying. When I came near he smiled, and tried to give me his hand. I administered the last rites at once. He remained conscious, I think, all the time, and then seemed asleep. For a while I fancied that I had been mistaken—that he might recover as he had before. I felt his pulse. It had stopped. I took the crucifix from him, as he had wished. Here it is. Wear it and be like him."

Hubert took the crucifix, kissed it with exceeding reverence, and tried to speak, but could not. He simply sobbed like a child, while tears burst from his eyes in a burning torrent. "I can't help it," he said, turning away.

"Don't try to help it," said Father Merivale. "Give way to it, or you will break down; and you must not do that. You cannot be spared."

"Thank you. Stay with me a little, if you can. I never felt helpless before; but I do now, and only you can help me."

"I will, with all my heart, and as long as you like."

Father Merivale remained there nearly two hours. Hubert then left the room to go again into the chapel.

Later in the afternoon Dr. Ranston arrived, ignorant of what had happened. When he heard it he turned very pale, and said:—

"This is indeed a great grief, an irremediable loss. I have been always afraid of it. But are you sure? Has any one attended him? Show me, please—show me where he is."

The side door was opened for him and he hurried on.

When he entered the chapel a great fear came over him. He had seen death many times, but never before realised what that invisible severance of soul and body implies. Where was the life of that which was now lifeless? Where was the unseen thing, the incorporeal *ens*, which a few hours ago was the substantial form of that beautiful body—informed it, made

it obedient to a higher law, and brought from those lips, now smiling in holy death, words of wisdom, of beauty, of intellectual power? Where was that now? What had become of it? What did he know, with any certainty, about it? What authority had he for any belief or opinion concerning it, beyond that of his own disbelief in the annihilation of what has once come into being? That was the amount of certainty which he found in himself now, when the mystery of death was before him for the first time as the one personal question of life. Emotional theories melted away like drops of water in a furnace. Grounds of belief, that seemed sufficient as long as they were not examined and had nothing to support, fell in at the first pressure. He felt a sudden and total want of belief, a strange and paradoxical responsibility for that want, a terrible sense of desolation and loss.

"If this that I dread is true," he thought, "unlimited negation is the only truth. But I cannot deny a thing unless I find it in my mind. How did the idea of the contrary get into my mind? Not out of nothing—*ex nihilo nihil fit*. We cannot create: we can only compose. There is an element of possibility in the wildest fable, and the impossibility of the whole consists mainly in disproportion between the means and the end. Untruth is disproportion, and there was no disproportion in his faith. I have borrowed this from him, though he never said it to me in so many words. I had thought out many and important things before he was born, yet he taught me how to think; and when I try to think my way out of this horrible, this unlooked-for abyss of unbelief, I find myself imitating him, following him. I *will* follow him. If there is such a thing as objective truth in religion—and if there is not, then faith can be nothing more than emotional opinion, as mine has been—if there is objective truth in religion, it must of necessity be exclusive. If it is to be known by us—and there is no use in it without—it must have been entrusted to some authority, as the Gospel says it was. There is One, and only One, that clearly has claimed it from the outset and maintained its claim throughout, only One that shows even probable credentials, only One that has not been begun, set up, started, raised up out of a revolt from the original one, and

founded on the assumption of its having been corrupted—which is equivalent to saying that the gates of hell have prevailed, that the Holy Ghost has not guided it to all truth, and therefore that the New Testament is a myth. Yes! Truth is in the Catholic Church, or God becomes the Unknown and Unknowable. The alternative is that, or absolute privation, hideously horrible. This is what he would have said; and there he lies, dead, yet as if alive, his soul reflected in his face. I have loved him as my own son, valued his friendship more than any distinction I ever gained, revered him as a complete human being, a being gifted with the highest qualities and the most exquisite proportion. Can it be that what he lived for, died in, and bears impressed on his countenance even now, is but '*the baseless fabric of a vision?*'

'*O death, made proud with pure and princely beauty!*'

Are you then the final destroyer of that which gives you a beauty not your own? If that is really the end for which the good strive and struggle, and suffer, and hope, and aspire, and control their natural inclinations, and do heroic deeds of charity, the pursuit of happiness is a delusion to all but the selfish and ignoble, who seek things that are in proportion with their own desires and may be obtained. But the desire for happiness is more deeply rooted in the higher instincts than in the lower. If the lower things are attainable under conditions, cannot the higher hope be realised under higher conditions? Both are implanted in us, and have a perceptible connection as master and servant. How can I know the truth? It is one thing to be intellectually convinced, another to realise the certainty of the unseen future as if we saw it. He who is there dead, yet in some manner living, yes! living—for all that he was cannot have passed into decaying matter—he would have said 'Pray for light, and you will have it.' He *does* say that. It is written on his face—that smiles, and speaks, and says to me, 'I have passed into what may be your own future, if you will. Accept the grace that is offered—that you feel to be offered. Are you sure that it was not offered before? Can you expect it again? Accept it while it is yours.' I will, I will. I see now that it was not conviction I wanted, but *will*—will to submit my own will to the Infinite Will.

Beautiful child of the Universal Creator, I will, I will."

He knelt by the body of Everard, and prayed as he had never prayed before, never imagined that he could pray; yet he used no words and wanted none.

He had been there some time, how long he knew not, when Elfrida came into the chapel, and unconscious of his presence, taught him how dependent human strength sometimes is on a force naturally less than its own. She had come prepared for a great struggle and armed with a fixed resolution to control herself while there, yet no sooner was the reality before her eyes than she broke down without any struggle at all. Ida rose calmly, led her out, and spoke words of comfort with a strange power. Her voice was firm: her eyes were tearless.

"And I too," thought Dr. Ranston, "found myself dependent on a force not my own: but it was a force greater than my own, infinitely greater."

He then went into the house, and meeting them on his way, bowed as he passed. When he saw those tearless eyes, he said to himself. "She will follow him soon."

CHAPTER XLVIII.



DAYS passed, one like another. Crowds came to the chapel each day: each day Ida came and went: still maintaining the same terrible calmness when the tearless eyes looked on Everard for the last time.

And then another day went by and another; and then she came again, to see all that remained of him on earth pass from among the things that are seen. She came early in the morning, and received Holy Communion within a few feet of the catafalque on which his coffin lay. When the Requiem Mass was sung she appeared to be calmer than

before, though she stood in sight of his open grave. Every one was surprised, except Dr. Ranston "She will follow him soon," he said again to himself when he saw her.

After the gospel there was a pause—not long, but marked, and then Father Merivale, walking slowly forward, stood near the altar rails to address the congregation. All eyes were turned on him except Ida's. The silence could be felt. He stood there awhile, mastering his emotion, and then with a perceptible effort, began to speak. When he did so, every syllable was heard by every one present. He said :

"In the Epistle for the day on which Everard Lord de Freville was called to God, are these words : 'Blessed is the man that is found without blemish. . . . Who is he, and we will praise him ? for he hath done wonderful things in his life. Who hath been tried . . . and made perfect, he shall have glory everlasting ; he that could have transgressed and hath not transgressed, and could do evil things and hath not done them.' In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"I see many sorrowful faces around me, and tearful eyes. It must needs be so. And yet in the greatness of our loss is to be found the greatness of the consolation ; for surely, with a reasonable confidence, though in all humility, we may believe that on this day we shall have laid a saint to rest.

"I have watched his joyous infancy and his innocent childhood. I have seen him grow into early manhood, like some fair citron tree, beautiful before God and man, bearing the flowers and graces of youth with the fruits of a riper age.

"Almighty God saw him, loved him, called him. Great was his strength to endure, because great was his love of God, and love is the fulfilling of the law. However much he suffered, the serenity of his soul was unclouded, because the eye of Faith was directed towards things unseen. The centre of his soul was steadfast, because it was fixed on the Love Divine.

"That love had made him strong, and evil was permitted to sift him as wheat, that his victories over himself might be great, that he might attain to a higher perfection, that he might be the more fitted to leave this 'Valley of Tears.' Yes, and for the sake of others also was he tried, as gold is refined in the fire, that by the brightness of his example and the tenderness of his charity many a poor soul might be won to God ; for,

as Archbishop Ullathorne says in his '*Ecclesiastical Discourses*,' 'Love, but above all, love that suffers is that which saves what love has died to redeem.'

"Speaking of the sanctity of the priestly life, he says, that the '*Lamp prepared for the Lord's anointed is the Light of Justice in the Flame of Charity*,' and he refers to a passage of St. John Chrysostom, in which the Saint laments that the Christian laity in the world are distinguished from the monks by the name of secular, as if diligence in aiming at a holy life belonged to monks alone. 'Not so,' says the Saint, 'not so. The same precepts and counsels of holiness are given by our Lord to all men. The injunction to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect was addressed to all.' 'This perfection,' as St. Thomas says, 'consists primarily in the love of God as the Supreme Good, and secondarily in the direction of this love to our neighbours, with whom God has associated us, and whom we should help with loving service towards the same Divine Beatitude. This twofold love, flowing from one principle of charity, is the perfection of life.' *

"And he, whom this day we lay to rest, may truly be said to have borne in his hand a lamp glowing with the light of justice and burning with the flame of charity. Though not a priest he aimed at sanctity: though not a monk, he strove after perfection.

"Desiring to love Him above all things 'Whom to love is justice' he daily grew in that love. He grew more and more to love and follow Him Who is the Only and Divine Son of the Eternal Father, perfect in beauty, supreme in strength, of Whom the greatest human strength and beauty is but a faint and wavering reflection; Who overcame the malice of the Evil Will by bringing His sinless human will into conformity with the will of His Divine Nature; Who is the conqueror of all because, being the Perfection of manhood, He overcame the world by first overcoming Himself as a man, and Who in the sufferings of that adorable humanity taught us, by His example, to love God and to suffer, if need be, for his sake.

"O felix culpa!' exclaims the Church on Holy Saturday. Happy fault of our first parents, because through their fall His infinite pity was not only manifested in the most stupendous act

* "*Ecclesiastical Discourses*," by the Right Rev. Dr. Ullathorne, Bishop of Birmingham, afterwards Archbishop of Cabasa.

of love, but also brought down to the level of our finite understanding.

"That was the love and the knowledge through which he whose loss we mourn this day grew strong to do and strong to endure; so that when sorrow came upon his young life, sudden and crushing, he murmured not nor complained, but raising his eyes to Calvary, where his dear Lord had hung on the bitter cross for his sake, laboured with heroic courage and an humble heart to 'deserve the instruction of His patience.' Therefore of him we may truly say '*Fecit enim mirabilia in vita sua*'—he hath done wonderful things in his life. '*Qui potuit transgredi et non est transgressus: facere mala, et non fecit.*'—he who could have transgressed and hath not transgressed, and could do evil things and hath not done them.

"He has passed out of this world, but he will never pass out of our memories. He will never be less to us than he is now. And there is one thing that we can still do for him—though it may seem to us unnecessary in his case—I mean, to pray for his dear soul. Cease not to remember him daily in your prayers; for though to our eyes he seemed indeed to correspond so perfectly with the graces bestowed on him as not to need our prayers, yet those graces were so great, his gifts were so rare and so many, that it behoves us still to pray. '*For to whom much is given from them is much required.*' And if, as I firmly believe, there has been no need of purgatory for him, still your prayers for him will not be lost. They will be garnered up in the treasure-house of the Church, and will help him to benefit in his death those whom he never forgot to pray for while he lived—the poor forgotten dead, who have no one to pray for them, and are still detained in a 'state of grief and suspended hope.'

"In a little while you will have left this holy place where he so often knelt. You will see him no more with your bodily eyes, but you will see him still in your memory, in the recollection of all that he was amongst us and all that he did, and in the impression that will remain like a beautiful picture, engraven on your hearts.

But that is not enough. You must try to imitate his example, as far as may be. Your means of usefulness may be different from his, and your powers and your nature, and your gifts, and the trials that will try you; but however much these may differ from his, you may, if you will, be guided by the same

principle that guided him. That principle is to do the Will of God for the love of God, and because it is His Will. In this we have the beginning and the completion of a rare example. By this he has done wonderful things in his life."

His voice failed, and he turned away almost abruptly. Suppressed sobs broke the silence, till both were lost in the touching Gregorian tones that again filled the chapel.

Ida had remained quite still and apparently impassable. She had never changed her kneeling position, never made the slightest movement, never wavered in her stony calmness. When the coffin was lifted from the catafalque she rose and followed it closely, but the tearless eyes were as if they saw not. Probably no one noticed her then, except Dr. Ranston. He did, and walked by her side. A few moments more, and the coffin was lowered into the grave, which by permission was inside the chapel, near the Lady Altar. And then the last scene of all—that moment never to be forgotten by those who have felt what it is—when the last sensible impressions connected with what we have most loved, is a creaking and a heavy thud, and a drawing up of cords and the tramp of feet.

She stood by to the end. No one noticed her then—not even Dr. Ranston, so great was the grief of all, until they heard a little rustling noise where she had stood, as if she were quietly moving away, and on looking up, they saw her sink, rather than fall to the ground. Dr. Ranston, being near, was just in time to save her head from coming in contact with the marble pavement. Elfrida ran to the spot.

"I should have attended more to her," she said, "I ought to have seen"—

"It would have been of no avail," said Dr. Ranston. "There is pressure on the brain—I felt convinced that there was as soon as I saw her this morning."

"But is there any hope? Can you do anything for her? If you could only bring her to herself, that I might hear her speak once more"—

Hubert lifted her up reverently, carried her to the king's room, and laid her on the old state bed.

"It was his at the last," he said, "and it shall be hers—and" he added in a low voice, "if she dies here, she shall be laid by his side."

She was alive but quite insensible. The tearless eyes

looked abstractedly into distance, as before, but their expression was more fixed and less intelligent. Her hands remained as they had fallen when he laid her down. They were very thin, and her whole body was so wasted away that she weighed little more than a child. He gently raised her head, and lifted from it the tumbled hat of black crape. Her golden hair fell from its fastenings, and by reason of its great length, rolled partly over her face. He smoothed it off with the tenderness of a woman, and quickly covering his face, burst into tears.

Father Merivale now came into the room, and stayed there, watching for signs of animation; but she remained insensible. Hubert and Elfrida watched by her bedside all that night, and the next day, and the next night.

Sir Richard stayed at Freville Chase, and was with her nearly all that time. Lady Dytchley was not there. Since Everard's death she had shut herself up in her room, refusing to see any one.

On the third morning Dr. Ranston sent for Father Merivale.

"I have hoped against hope," he said, "that she would recover consciousness for a while. I have no hope of it now. You had better lose no time."

After receiving the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, however, she became conscious and spoke; but the signs of death were now evident.

"Hubert, where are you?" she said, "come nearer. Give me your hand. You have been so wise and so good about Everard all through, and so wonderfully kind to me. I ask the forgiveness and the prayers of all whom I have injured—and that means all this household—but you the most, and then of Elfrida, and then of Mrs. Roland. Where is she? And of all, all—tell them all—and of my father and of my mother, and of one who alone has need of forgiveness from me. Tell him that I do forgive him from my heart. I told him so in the chapel by the side of Everard; but tell him so when I am dead, and ask his, for I wronged even him. And Hubert, take care of my poor mother; see her as much as you can, and try to comfort her. You can do it better than any one, for you have grown so like Everard lately, so very like, that she will believe what you say. God bless you! Pray for me."

He took her hand and kissed it, saying, "We must pray for each other. I shall have a great responsibility."

His voice was faint and broken. Tears rolled over the wasted hand that he held.

"And now," she said, "leave me a little while with Father Merivale."

When they returned she was dying. Presently a radiant smile passed over her face, and she said, "Yes it is Everard. He is waiting for me, there in glistening white and others with him."

Her voice was becoming weaker and less distinct. Hubert could only just catch the sound of these words:—"Jesus my Saviour, my God Jesus" Then her lips moved still, as if she were trying to pronounce again the most Holy Name, but no sound came from them. Suddenly she raised her arms a little, and stretched them out like a child, while her eyes appeared to look through the dimness that was gathering round them. In another moment her arms fell, her eyes lost their light, and she breathed no more.

"God rest her soul!" said Father Merivale. "Be comforted. She has passed from sorrows greater than she could bear and live. She has died in dispositions worthy of him whose wife she was fitted to be. In saying that, I have said all. Do not grieve—at least not for her. Life had become a question of weeks or months, lived through in pain of earthly loss too great for endurance. Her death is in harmony with her preparation for it—full of consolation for us all."





CHAPTER XLIX.



ON the following Saturday Ida was laid by the side of Everard, near the altar of Our Lady. A few hours later on the same day, De Beaufoy and Lady Fyfield came to Hazeley, where they had been expected some time before. They had been at Lourdes and come home through Brittany, so that even the news of Everard's death had not reached them. Sherborne was not at home, nor Mrs. Sherborne, nor Mrs. Atherstone, but they arrived soon afterwards, and came into the library together, dressed in deep mourning.

"What has happened? I have heard nothing," said De Beaufoy. "Is he dead—I mean De Freville?"

"Yes, he is gone," answered Mrs. Atherstone, "and she too. He is gone, and the world is the poorer for his loss. He was buried ten days ago, and to-day we have seen Ida laid in the same grave. Little more than a year ago we were talking about them in this very room. That was the beginning, and soon afterwards there was the beginning of the end. We have to-day seen the end. A more wretched waste, a more destructive misuse of responsibility, a more fearful instance of what a man possessing good qualities can sink to, if he loses the Grace of God, never startled the experience of the world. And yet the three people who deprived society of one whose remarkable qualities made holiness attractive even to the irreligious—the three people who did this amount of mischief—are not wicked. A mixed marriage has really been the cause of it all. If Sir Richard and Lady Dytechley had both been Catholics, or both Protestants, it could not have happened. She would not have had the temptation to deceive herself that she had."

"I feel the profoundest pity for poor Sir Richard, who is quite broken down," said Sherborne, and if possible, still

more for Lady Dytechley, who has nothing whatever to comfort her. The doctors can't make out what is the matter. She sits all day long on a sofa in her room with her back to the window, doing nothing and hardly speaking when spoken to. She won't go downstairs, and says she can't. Sir Richard tried to persuade her to go out, and get some air, but she wouldn't hear of it, and kept on repeating, "No, no! I won't. I can't pass by the library, where I saw him for the last time before I went abroad on that dreadful journey. I see him now as he stood there, and hear his voice. I can't go past that door. 'Don't ask me. Don't speak to me.' She has been in that state ever since he died. They have been afraid to tell her of her daughter's death. She refuses to see Hubert or anyone."

"Ida," said Mrs. Atherstone, "asked Lord de Freville, when she was dying, to look after and comfort her mother. She said he had grown so like his brother, that he would have more effect than any one else; and so he has—startlingly like—Poor dear, Ida! The last days of her life were an example for all of us. Everything I saw that day and to-day was a lesson. The character of the man and the traditions of the house were written on the countenances of the servants."

"As long as I can remember," said Sherborne, "that house bore the stamp of feudalism, in the higher acceptation of the term. The servants were and are a part of the family, not a separate caste agreeing to the terms of a contract."

"One can see it, and a beautiful sight it is. There is nothing nobler than service of that kind. It can't be bought. It has no proportionate value in money. It doesn't represent the value of money."

"No, indeed. I have a respect for Mrs. Roland that amounts to reverence. Tell me. Was there any immediate cause of his death?"

"He saved the Marquis Moncalvo's life by sheer pluck and strength," said Sherborne, "and at considerable risk, when the wretched man was trying to commit suicide, and he took him to Freville Chase and brought him back to his duties. That was enough to account for it, in his state of health, when excitement of any kind was forbidden. But the real mischief was done all at once in Rome. It was the

sudden and tremendous act of self-repression. You know the circumstances."

"I do," said De Beaufoy. "It was enough to kill the soundest man. The more there was in him the worse it would be. In his position, I don't know how I could have grasped the fact that self-control was a duty at all. His own betrothed wife was there. The deception was evident. He was attacked savagely. If he had forgotten to let go, no one would have blamed him. The result of that grip would only have been the natural consequence of a life and death struggle, in which he, being the stronger, had the best of it. The question would have settled itself without any act of his, other than one of self-defence. That he should have been able to think of anything else, at such a moment, and grapple successfully with all the strongest instincts of outraged human nature in the space of a second or two, is a marvel, and makes one feel how hard a thing heroic virtue is to practise."

"Yes," said Sherborne. "It makes one feel very small, if one applies the case and the probabilities to oneself. I don't know which is the grandest—that or his latest act."

"Such an example," said Mrs. Atherstone, "of a man living in the world—who was, in the best sense of the term, a man of the world—appeals practically to all of us. There are instances enough at this very time of heroic virtue in the clergy and religious orders, if people will take the least possible trouble to look for them; but an example *in* the world appeals directly to us who are living in it. One can't say, 'These are things of the higher life, to which God has not called me.' There it is before us—a model whose principles we can and ought to follow, however differently we may be tried and gifted: for his principle was simply to do the Will of God as he found it, and in doing no more than was his bare duty to do, he made bare acts of duty heroic."

"I think you are going a little too far there," said De Beaufoy. "Surely when he went out of his way to find the Marquis Moncalvo, he went a good deal beyond bare duty."

"Not beyond his own standard of duty, which is what we must judge him by. He knew, or rather had good grounds for supposing, that the Marquis was in a desperate state of mind—utterly disappointed, humbled, crushed, perishing of

despair—and that no one but himself could have a chance of saving him. Is it beyond the line of bare duty to save a soul that is perishing almost at your gates? I think not. Look again at what he did in Rome, and consider what he would have done then, if he had not done just what he did. Was it more than duty to abstain from that? Go through the whole of his career, as far as we know about him, and you will find it summed up in the words quoted by Father Merivale, '*Qui potuit transgredi et non est transgressus, facere mala et non fecit.*'"

"You are right, as I have always found you," said De Beaufoy. "It was all bare duty, in the strict sense of the term. And yet the thing was in each case, as hard to do as if he had gone beyond the line of duty."

"Yes, and perhaps much harder to reach than many things beyond it would have been. His trials were as hard to flesh and blood as they could well be; and yet we should all of us feel called upon to do as he did, if we were given the same. In that lies the real value of what he did. First it appeals to the consciences of people in every position of life. Secondly, flesh and blood can sympathise with it, and realise the possibility of doing great things if called upon to do them. Thirdly, it shows what can be done by the power of will energising under obedience to the highest law, in opposition to its own impulses."

"As to the trials themselves," said Sherborne, "they were virtually as old as fallen human nature. Given the accidental concurrence of wishes and opportunities, they were sure to follow as they did. There was nothing original in them, except their composition, which depended partly on the way in which they occurred, but mainly on him. He made them his own, like a great painter, by his way of treating them."

"Precisely," said Mrs. Atherstone; "and if you run your mind over the course of his latter life, you will find that, when besieged by temptations fearfully strong and deceptive, he did what he was called to do about them. '*Potuit transgredi et non est transgressus, facere mala et non fecit.*' But just reverse the facts, and suppose him to have not acted as he did. What would those passages in his life look like then? At once the duty becomes apparent. I am not detracting anything from his merit—I admire him more than I can express—but only showing what we all know, that to

do our bare duty well is often the hardest thing we could have set before us ; and that his having set it before him was the best proof of what Almighty God, Who never requires more than we can do, knew him to be capable of. What an amount of will is implied in the acts we have been speaking of—and not only of will, but of cultivated will ! If his will had not been trained like the muscles of an athlete, it could never have borne the strain."

"Where is he buried ?" said De Beaufoy. "I must say a *De Profundis* over his grave before I go home, though I feel sure that he doesn't need it. If he did, it would be a bad look out for most of us."

"In the chapel," said Sherborne. "They got permission for that. A monument has been designed already. There will be a recumbent figure on it. The face is to be copied from a cast that was taken after his death."

"Was the Freville bell heard ? I don't pretend to say what it is, but I certainly heard it myself, six and twenty years ago."

"I didn't like to ask any one at Freville Chase about it so soon," said Mrs. Sherborne, "but several people have told me that it was distinctly heard ringing far away over the Chase when he was taken ill at Rome, and again about two months before his death. I have often thought since of the old prophecy that I copied out of the muniment room when I was a child. You remember the second line :—

When the knell is heard o a dying race,

He was supposed, for a time, as you know, to be the last of the Frevilles."

"Certainly," said De Beaufoy, "the fulfilment, or whatever one may call it, is curiously correct. I don't know what the proper definition of a broken heart is, but he died of something as much like it as one can imagine. By his charity he won the soul of the Marquis Moncalvo, who was the cause of his death in that way. Then again, the race would have died out, if Hubert Freville had not turned out to be his brother, who had been practically lost."

"Lost, as his brother," said Mrs. Atherstone ; "lost even as the owner of a name. And the photograph that proved his identity was sent by a stranger—the Italian woman.

Lastly, Everard Lord de Freville has gone to his reward, having given Life, the true Life, to Freville Chase, by bringing its present owner and his wife into the One True Fold. He certainly would do for a hero of romance. One can fancy such men as he fighting in the Holy Wars under the Pio Buglione. He lives in the memory of all who are not quite unworthy of having known him, and the impression he has left on our hearts will make us remember those old lines carved in the muniment room :—

“ Wbenn a Soule ys wonne by ye harte ytt bath ybrokenne,
and ye knelle ys berde of a dvinge Race,
ye loste shall winne by ye Strayngere byr tokenne,
and ye Dedde give Lyfe unto Frevyle Chase.”

THE END.



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In another letter the Archbishop writes :—

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